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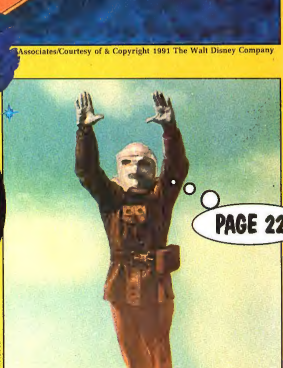

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WORD BALLOONS

Flight Plans

Somehow, it's fitting to contemplate the Rocketeer as I'm hurtling cross-country, above the clouds and into the wild blue yonder. Fortunately, I *am* using a plane.

As a passenger on a 747, you get some idea of how truly simple it is to fly. Child's play really. All you have to do is sit back in your seat, fasten the belt and wait to be served warmed-over gruel in attractive trays made of real plastic in six decorator colors. Ahh, this is the life!

In reality, it takes weeks of full-time training (at least) to learn to fly in the military, months (part-time) in a civilian piper cub, years before you're ready to command a commercial jetliner.

For Cliff Secord, it didn't take more than a few minutes. He strapped on the rocket pack, fiddled with the controls and zoomed off—maybe not in the most dignified manner—into the sky. He could fly. This, of course, *isn't* reality. It's something even better, comic books.

Secord is the Rocketeer, that airborne adventurer created by Dave Stevens in the tradition of Commando Cody and (Jeff) King of the Rocket Men, those lookalike heroes of Republic Pictures' serials past. Remember them? Well, it's OK if you don't; their exploits are chronicled on page 22 and their three chapterplays are on video.

So, the other weekend, I watched *Radar Men from the Moon* starring George Wallace as Commando Cody battling that lunar looney, Retik. What great fun! What high-flying adventure! What a lot of stock footage!

The stock footage is really only annoying if you do something stupid and watch (like I did) all 12 chapters in a row. Naahh! Serials were *made* to be serialized; to truly appreciate them, they *must* "to be continued." Do what I (usually) do: Watch one chapter every Saturday morning. Make some popcorn. Show cartoons, a Western and selected short subjects. Stick bubblegum under the seat. And charge yourself admission.

Those cliffhangers are still the most amusing part of the serial experience. Even though our hero seems to bite the big one at the end of Chapter Seven, he *will* (with certain surprising exceptions) survive to seem to bite the big one another day. How, for instance, does Commando Cody get out of that about-to-crash airplane? Could it be his strength, intelligence, courage, stamina, clean living? Nope! It's that most awesome of serial hero powers: The ability to replay the explosive scene from another, safer camera angle.

No wonder it's easier to get out of there alive or not to say or do anything silly. Wish I could do that—replay all the angles of my life to the best effect—but no matter, being able to fly would be the *next* best thing.

Man has always wanted to fly. And if we can't do it, our heroes certainly can. Such aeronautical skills are especially common in superherodom. Lotsa ultrahuman types soar up into the sky—Captain Marvel, the Human Torch, Mighty Mouse. This issue boasts a squad of high-flying heroes—from those who come by it naturally (Dr. Solar, Nova, the Comet, Firestar, Marvel Boy, Cannonball) to those who rely on various mechanical devices (Rocketeer, Wonder Man, the Fly). Flight is the second or third most popular superheroic trait—somewhere after amazing strength and fantastic verbal agility (i.e. one-liners for all super-occasions).

The issue, however, belongs specifically to those lost planet airmen—veteran aeronaut George Wallace remembers life as Commando Cody on page 27, while newcomer Bill Campbell reveals his adventures as the Rocketeer on page 33. And the movie? As you read this, *The Rocketeer* is just landing on theater screens. What I've seen of it looks terrific. The script is great fun. And Bill Campbell *really* looks the part—as if he has just stepped out of a Dave Stevens comic, strapped on the rocket pack and zoomed off into the wild blue yonder, taking a first-class flight all the way. Without a plane. And, fortunately for him, without the airline food.

—David McDonnell/Editor

COMICS SCENE RETURNS with all the usual mutants, vigilantes, legends & Toons in **COMICS SCENE #21, on sale August 22, 1991. MEANWHILE**, next month, the name of the game is **Zorro** in **COMICS SCENE SPECTACULAR #5, on sale July 23, 1991.**

LETTERING

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COMICS SCENE
475 Park Avenue South, 8th Flr.
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...Just would like to correct some items of misinformation that were in the lead-off in the article on Neil Gaiman in COMICS SCENE #18.

Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* series wasn't created before *Black Orchid*, nor was a proposal submitted to me for at least a few months after the *Black Orchid* series was first submitted. Neil had expressed interest in doing something with Sandman when Jenette Kahn and I first met him over four years ago, but the character was tied up with another writer at the time.

It wasn't until Jenette and Dick Giordano decided to release the other writer's "hold" on the character that Neil was asked to submit his series proposal. Upon its receipt, the proposal went through the normal company procedures (which is not, by the way, having a proposal sit on an editor's desk until the Editor-in-Chief asks to see it).

Karen Berger
Group Editor,
British Liaison
DC Comics

...Thank you for the great feature on Neil Gaiman, *Sandman* and *Books of Magic*. Those are two of the best series I have ever read. I hope that *all* those projects Gaiman mentioned see print, and soon.

More thanks are in order for the in-depth coverage of TV's best show, *The Flash*. This is the best live-action treatment of a comic book character. Of course, it could get better, but so far, so good. John Wesley Shipp is great as Barry Allen. He seems much more into the role than Michael Keaton was as Batman. I would really like to see more comic book villains. Mark Hamill's Trickster was great. He should reprise the role soon.

I must admit the first thing I do as soon as I get COMICS SCENE in the mail is turn to Comics Screen. The possibilities are endless. So, why does Marvel keep having problems? Why can't a good movie be done of a Marvel character?

Arnold Jordan
12955 S.W. 53 Street
Miami, FL
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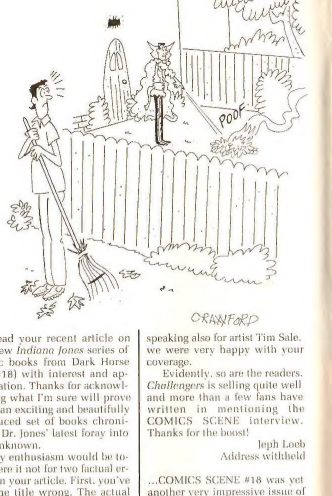
That is a rhetorical question, isn't it? Why aren't there more good movies, *period?*



Art: Randy Crawford

...I read your recent article on the new *Indiana Jones* series of comic books from Dark Horse (CS #18) with interest and appreciation. Thanks for acknowledging what I'm sure will prove to be an exciting and beautifully produced set of books chronicling Dr. Jones' latest foray into the unknown.

My enthusiasm would be total were it not for two factual errors in your article. First, you've got the title wrong. The actual name is *Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis*. Second, the plot doesn't come from *any* idea for a film, discarded or otherwise, but from an original story that Noah Falstein and myself concocted for a Lucasfilm computer game.

Thanks for your interest, and thanks for giving me the chance to set the record straight.

Hal Barwood
Indy Atlantis
Designer/Project Leader

...Just wanted to say "Thank you" for your piece on *Challengers of the Unknown* in COMICS SCENE #18.

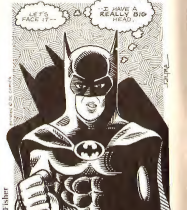
Reporter Michael McAvennie took my long, rambling conversation (sorry, Michael!) and turned it into a piece even *I* found interesting.

Your choice of graphics and layout were excellent. All in all, speaking also for artist Tim Sale, we were very happy with your coverage.

Evidently, so are the readers. *Challengers* is selling quite well and more than a few fans have written in mentioning the COMICS SCENE interview. Thanks for the boost!

Jeph Loeb
Address withheld

...COMICS SCENE #18 was yet another very impressive issue of what I can unhesitatingly call the best magazine of its type available today. I am still waiting for you to come out with a



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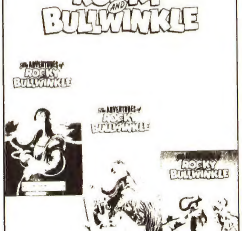

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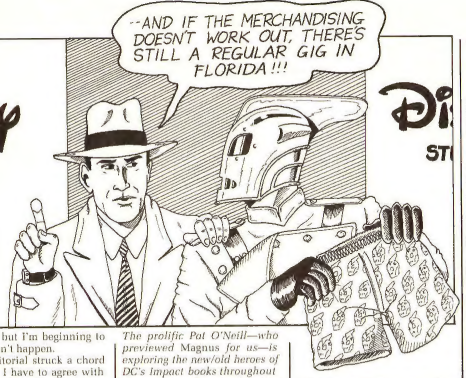

The prolific Pat O'Neill—who previewed Magnus *for us—is exploring the new/old heroes of DC's Impact books throughout the next several issues. See page 17 for O'Neill's look at* Dr. Solar, *another old hero revised by Shooter for Valiant Comics.*

bad issue, but I'm beginning to think it won't happen.

The editorial struck a chord in me and I have to agree with Dave McDonnell on all his points. Of course, since this piece was written, DC has announced that the old MLJ characters, the Fly, Shield, Jaguar and Comet will be joining the parade of nostalgia weaving its way through the pages of comics these days. A few of my friends have reacted with something less than wild enthusiasm at this news, but I have to admit I'm very excited at the prospect of seeing these heroes relaunched for another shot at the big time. I know that past attempts have failed miserably to generate anything approaching quality stories and art, but the news that Mark Waid will be co-writing some of the books is enough to inspire hope in me that this time, maybe the potential inherent in these figures of the past will be realized. Again, I'm reminded of your editorial. After all, Waid is well known as a longtime fan and this has shown in his work. His enthusiasm for characters I'm sure he recalls from his younger days will be a big asset in trying to breathe life into the Fly and the Comet.

Add these latest revamps to the list mentioned and the old adage "The more things change..." certainly rings true. Will you be doing a feature on the DC Impact comics? I hope so. The article on *Magnus, Robot Fighter* this time only added to my eagerness to see Jim Shooter's version of one of my favorite comics from the '60s. I'm sure your writers would do an equally interesting job on these new ventures from DC.

Dale Coe
56 Whitecross Road
Warrington, Cheshire
England WA5 1LR

...I'm glad to see that at least one magazine comments on the Japanese comic books and animation. That's why I recently bought COMICS SCENE #18. I enjoyed the article on the movie *Akira*, since I'm thinking about buying the movie. I also enjoyed the articles on Wolverine and the Flash. Those illustrations of Wolverine are incredible! All of your articles were very well written, though I was disappointed by the rest.

Look at the picture on page 46. Disgusting! Who in their right mind would actually sit down and draw that? Who wrote it? Who buys it?

"Dreaming of Miracles" looks odd, too. I can't believe that Eclipse Comics would sink so low as to print something like that. Indiana Jones better stick to movies. "You sonuvagun." Is that what the woman said on page 14? Well, golly-gee who's the writer, a first grade teacher?

Robot Fighter looks typical. The helpless woman protected by the big strong superhero who can lift up 12-story-high buildings. Compare those robots to something like Zeta Gundam. No wonder I only buy Japanese comic books.

Jason Whorley
1244 Glenhaven Road
Baltimore, MD 21239

...Issue #18 was a pretty good issue. I'm really looking forward to the *Rocketeer* movie and *Magnus: Robot Fighter.*

The John Wesley Shipp interview was great! Any plans to do interviews with Amanda Pays and/or Alex Desert?

Robert O'Keefe's letter brought up some good points, and I agree with many of them, except the part about the Flash and the Turtles.

The latter point is the one I wish to address. True, the original *Turtles* comic is still around, but it comes about four times a year and the recent stories (except "Turtles Take Time" and "Sky Highway") have been executed by "guest writers and artists" who think it's exactly the same as that awful cartoon! I don't mind that there's a separate kiddie version, but what I *do* mind is that the general public will always see the Turtles as pizza-guzzling surfer-dude rejects and not the great vengeance-seeking, complex heroes with whom Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird made comics history.

Gregg Allinson
Address withheld

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Fabian Nicieza gets an education, writing lesson plans for super-teens.

By DREW BITTNER

I want you to put this in big black headlines, OK? "ROB LIEFELD AND I HATE EACH OTHER'S GUTS!" shouts Fabian Nicieza, speaking of his partner on Marvel's new *X-Force* title.

Nicieza chuckles and quickly amends, "I *don't* hate him, no; we've just started working together. We're evolving as a team, but hey, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby didn't start out at the top, did they? Listen to me, name-dropping like that..."

But as Marvel's hottest new writer/editor, Nicieza has nothing to apologize for. His *New Warriors* has become a surprise hit, his Captain America deluxe mini-series is finally on the way and *X-Force* looks to join Marvel's formidable array of mutant books as an odds-on favorite before it even hits the stands.

"Rob has a million and one ideas for this book's first year, more ideas than most writers have for years and years of their books," says Nicieza. "He's really excited about the whole thing. My job is scripting the book, but I'm also giving Rob some guidance, helping him avoid some snags, 'cause he's just starting as a writer [Liefeld discusses *X-Force* in CS SPECTACULAR #4]. I was in LA not long ago, and we had dinner and talked about the book for maybe three, four hours; I was blown away by the stuff he has in mind. I'll be along to give all this creativity some structure, help channel it a bit."

Photo: Courtesy Marvel Comics

Dogged with a busy comics schedule, Fabian Nicieza is aware of his limits. "I'm trying to scale back."

Art: Mark Bagley & Larry Mahlstedt

The writer thought the New Warriors were "the *perfect* group of characters for me to work with."

For the few comics readers still in the dark, *X-Force* picks up where *New Mutants* left off when the title ended at #100. The New Mutants have gone in separate directions and a new team has formed around the enigmatic warrior/cyborg known as Cable. This group, says Nicieza, will be radically different from the New Mutants.

"We had to fight to change this thing to *X-Force*," the writer explains. "The editors said people think we throw out too many #1's and try to milk collectors, but this new book is so far removed from *New Mutants*, we couldn't use the same title for both.

"*X-Force* is about this group of teenagers led by Cable, a Dirty Harry for the mutant set. These kids aren't students or bystanders; they're *soldiers*—they're being trained to fight for their survival, because the world's a dangerous place, Cable tells them, and it's going to get a lot worse. Cable can see the writing on the wall, and he's not above taking mighty drastic action to win the war he sees coming."

On that front, Nicieza says *X-Force* will be much more aggressive, carrying the fight to their enemies, where other hero groups have usually reacted to trouble.

"Their tactics are violently confrontational," he confirms, "and this will probably get them into trouble, not only with the public but with the other mutant groups, too. Cable moved them out of the school because he said their methods wouldn't be approved of by their 'landlords,' the X-Men and new X-Factor team, and he's right. There are going to be fireworks."

In providing quick thumbnail sketches of each character, Nicieza reveals the depth of thought that goes into his work, the dynamics that may breathe fresh air into the concept of young heroes.

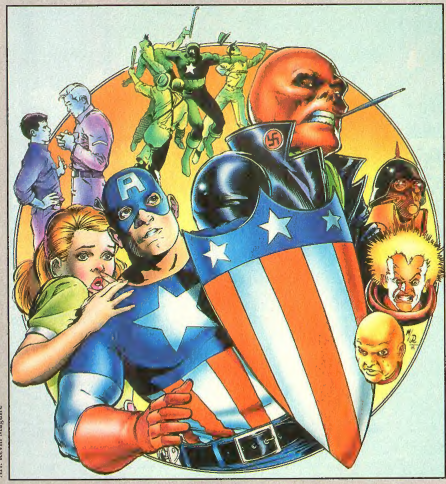
"Cable is a sort of father figure, maybe, but he's more like a drill sergeant in the Marines," says the scribe. "Hard but fair, he'll expend his troops in service to the cause if he needs to, but he won't waste them on dumb fights and individual combats. He'll be developing a father/son relationship with Cannonball, as he tries to mold Sam into the sort of take-charge deputy he needs; Sam, on the other hand, is going to try to soften Cable's ultra-tough approach. There'll be some disappointment on each side, because each believes the other could give more, be the person *they* want, and it'll be a strong situation developing there.

"Domino is the go-between, the human ear for the kids to talk to and which Cable listens to," he adds. "She's cynical but lighthearted—how's that for a contradiction?—and she knows a lot about Cable, which helps us see the man in a different light. She's a definite wild card here.

"Cannonball, like I said, will have his share of fights with Cable. Sam is basically a good man in a very bad situation; a real noble and kind character who's growing harder as he gets older. We may see something develop between Sam and Boom-Boom, who is Sam's opposite in many ways. She has a tough front she shows the world and this makes her perfectly happy in X-Force, where everybody keeps their guard up all the time. She has real vulnerabilities and problems; we're going to learn a great deal about her in the series, because she has been around a long time [since *Secret Wars II*], but nobody knows anything about her. We all know people like that—real smooth, glib and bulletproof emotionally."

Nicieza describes James Proudstar (Warpath) as an "ex-Hellion and a man with a mission. He's serving Cable's ends to gain his own, nothing else. Will he stay afterward? I don't know. How long can you be driven by vengeance? He'll find out how hard it is to live with anger, the kind of bone-deep rage that killed his brother. How will he handle it? How can you live with yourself when violence is your only answer to life's problems? A lot of dark humor is going to rise out of him.

Nicieza insists *The Adventures of Captain America* is "the definitive early Cap—until somebody else comes along and does it all over again."



Art: Kevin Maguire

"We've also got Shatterstar, who's probably the easiest and hardest guy to understand. He's a genetically engineered soldier who fought in a world where battle is entertainment and entertainment is everything. He needs X-Force's help to fight the rulers back home, so he's going to be a good soldier, the only thing he's good at. Shatterstar is the dark side of Longshot—they come from the same place, but that's all they have in common."

The last new addition to the X-Force roster is Feral, a catlike ex-Morlock. "You know how a normal domestic cat will just go and savage a mouse to death for the hell of it? That's Feral," Nicieza explains. "She's completely uncontrollable, a Wolverine without the self-discipline, and she may be too extreme even for X-Force, which is saying something. This lady's a berserk killing machine, just like your normal housecat can be, and that'll be the barometer for how extreme this group is willing to go. When we came up with her, we deliberately tossed out Wolfsbane; this girl isn't Rahne. She's a killer."

As dangerous as the new team sounds, they're going to need all the ferocity and fighting savvy they can get to survive their first year. Nicieza and Liefeld plan to ring in major villains like Magneto, Juggernaut and Black Tom, an all-new Brotherhood of Evil Mutants and the already-glimpsed Mutant Liberation Front, whose leader, Stryfe, is a dead ringer for Cable. The amazingly popular mercenary Deadpool will also return, as will acrobat/tycoon Gideon, who will be mentoring Sunspot and his own group of mutant heroes, The Profit$.

"Everything will come to a head at the end of the first year," Nicieza reveals," in a big story involving SHIELD, the all-new X-Factor group and the resurrection of Project Wideawake [the Sentinels].

"I think we have real breakout success potential with this book, but that's for the readers to determine. It may look like we have all the elements—ah, time will tell."

Time has taken its toll with Fabian Nicieza, as he considers two writing assignments, one successful and one, well...

"I'm leaving *Alpha Flight*," he announces. "It wasn't working out the way I had wanted—don't know why. I hoped I would have an affinity for these characters and it never clicked. Maybe it's all the history these guys have, maybe it's the idea of a Canadian hero group. Whatever; it didn't pan out for me, so I'm gonna pass the book to someone else."

However, Nicieza is more than happy with another project that's finally seeing the light of day: A deluxe format Captain America mini-series, *The Adventures of Captain America*.

"[Artist] Kevin Maguire and I were down in his basement kicking around ideas, and we made these notes on huge sheets of tag paper," he relates. "We mapped out Cap's history. When the story opens, he *isn't* Captain America; he's Steve Rogers in a costume. When it's all over, he's a living symbol of his country.

"We go into everything on this one. Why was Steve Rogers the only one chosen for this project? Well, he *wasn't*. Why does the Red Skull hate him so much? Partly, the Red Skull had a hand in creating this guy. Who is Bucky, and why did the Army let a 14-year-old run around with their top hero in Europe? We had a blast with Bucky; this series really goes into who he was, and I think some of the best stuff revolves around him.

"I'm proud as hell of this baby," Nicieza says about the mini-series. "Kevin and I *nailed* this sucker! Kevin's still pencilling some of it. He's mighty talented, but he's mighty slow, too. Joe Rubinstein is inking the first book, Terry Austin, the second and, if he has the time, maybe the final two as well. Everybody wants Terry, and we were lucky to get him for even one

Nicieza hoped for an affinity with Alpha Flight, but "it just never clicked."

Art: Jackson Guice

Nicieza describes Nomad as "an MTV-style Punisher," so don't be on this guy's Top 20 Countdown.

Art: James Fry/McKenna

Art: Jackson Guice

Mutant mayhem abounds when Nicieza pens this year's *New Warriors*, *New Mutants*, *X-Factor* and *X-Men* annuals.

book. I wish we could have released it last year, when Cap was bigger news, but things just didn't work out that way. But anyone who likes Captain America will love this book."

Nicieza and Maguire used the 1970s Roger Stern/John Byrne retelling of Cap's origin, saying it was more coherent than other, earlier origin stories that weren't meant to withstand the test of time.

"Nobody was worrying about continuity or making rigid sense back then," Nicieza says. "We're going to make this the definitive early Cap—until somebody else comes along and does it all over again."

In the meantime, Nicieza is more than satisfied with his other teen-hero team, the New Warriors.

"This book is more complicated for me [than *X-Force*] and I've had to compromise sometimes, as [editor] Danny Fingeroth and I see things differently," he says. "Say, 85 percent of the time, it works out better that we have this give-and-take. It makes for a better book.

"When they appeared in *Thor*, I thought right off the bat that this was the *perfect* group of characters for me to work with, the right balance of established detail and *tabula rasa*, blankness. Mostly, they were a blank slate I could fill in, and the ideas just flowed. I've got up to issue #30 or #40 plotted already."

The writer believes teenagers make great characters "because they're so unrestricted. My group is out there, doing their thing, not answering to anybody except themselves. They're fresh and don't have all the back-history that other groups have to deal with, and I'm writing characters I really love. I mean, I always wanted to do Speedball. Everyone said he was a nobody, but I think I've turned folks around. Many people really like the guy now. Everyone thought Night Thrasher was done to death, but I made it work for me. He's not a raging lunatic; he's a desperately lonely and unhappy young man who never knew how to be happy, never knew how to make friends. He's fighting for justice, not vengeance, and he's deeper than maybe some readers might have guessed when they first saw him.

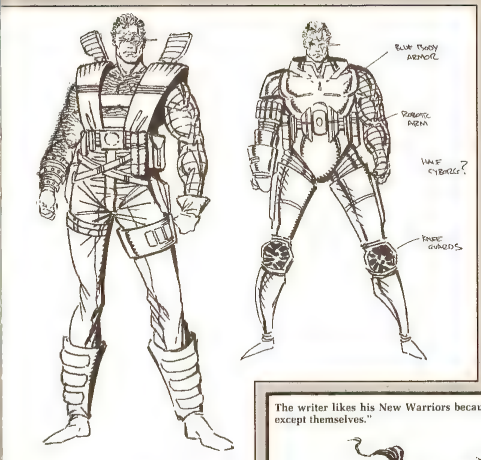
"Many people thought [the New Warriors] wouldn't go anywhere, that they would just flounder around in the middle of the pack, but they did great," Nicieza says proudly. "We've gotten congratulations from around the office, which makes me proud. And I'm glad I've got such great characters, and that everybody knows it. Hey, the New Warriors have become my friends."

Cable Designs: Rob Liefeld

The scribe adds that writing the book led him to draw from different sources, including *The Breakfast Club*.

"That movie has a bunch of really diverse characters thrown together," Nicieza explains, "and they find a way to pull it together and understand each other a little. That's its emotional and personal level; the other side is social responsibility. These kids are looking at the world and trying to do something about the problems they see, to do the right thing, no matter what. It's damn hard to do. I hope teenagers in the '90s are absorbing this, not only from comics, but from what's going on around them. When I think about the '80s, all I think of are bunches of Alex P. Keatons [Michael J. Fox's *Family Ties* materialist/yuppie character]. There's room for the Alexes, but why not for the young Abbie Hoffmans, too? And as the book goes on, they'll keep evolving and growing like in real life."

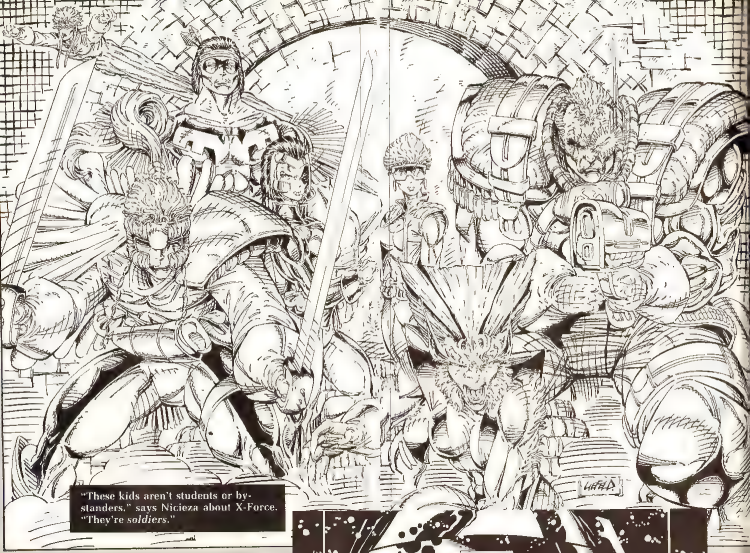
Nicieza's next major effort could be (and sometimes is) drawn from real life, when *Nomad* becomes a monthly title in 1992



Rob Liefeld's original designs for Cable, whom Nicieza calls "a Dirty Harry for the mutant set."

The writer likes his New Warriors because they're "not answering to anybody except themselves."

Art: Mark Bagley/Larry Mahlstedt



"These kids aren't students or bystanders," says Nicieza about X-Force. "They're *soldiers*."

picking up where his series left off.

"He's an MTV-style Punisher," Nicieza explains. "The decision to keep the baby [in issue #4 of the miniseries] was spur-of-the-moment, 'cause we saw a lot of potential in it. Not that we're going to be doing a *Lone Wolf and Cub* thing...well, maybe a little."

Says Nicieza, "The real heart of this book is a guy searching for the country he both loves and hates, trying to make a little justice along the way. I'm using lots of stuff drawn from the real world for this book. Almost every day, something in the paper hits me and I clip it out and save it to use in *Nomad*." Nicieza uses a recent incident in which several LA policemen were videotaped beating a suspect as an example. "They've got something coming to them, don't you think? Things like that are what *Nomad* will be about."

The flip side of Nicieza's comics career is editing a large and eclectic collection of titles. They include *ALF* (soon to be cancelled), *Mighty Mouse* (likewise, though Nicieza hopes it will reappear in limited-series form someday), *Sweet XVI* ("like *Archie* in Roman Empire times") and a couple of forthcoming titles, like *Wonder Man* (see page 45) and *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventures*.

Art: Jackson Guice

Art: Rob Liefeld

Just when things were getting interesting, Nicieza sighs, "I'm leaving *Alpha Flight*."

Art: Rob Liefeld

Selected Art Courtesy Rob Liefeld

Nicieza describes X-Force's Shatterstar as "the dark side of Longshot."

Nicieza describes Simon Williams (Wonder Man) as "a great hero and a bad actor, and he would rather be a so-so hero and a terrific actor. It's going to be Hollywood superhero action, 'cause LA's a happening place. We're also doing the movie adaptation of *Bill and Ted II* and we launch the book from there. It won't be a kiddie book: it'll be sly, satiric, maybe a little *Simpsons*-esque. Basic, mean-spirited humor."

His other editorial projects include another *Damage Control* mini-series, a martial arts video game tie-in called *Double Dragon*, a monthly title following the post-*House Party* exploits of Kid 'n Play ("This is *not* the Saturday morning cartoon," Nicieza insists. "This is a Code-approved *Love & Rockets*") and a trade paperback collection of the short-lived *Rocky & Bullwinkle* comic, which Nicieza would also like to see return sometime in a sharper, upscale format.

So, with all this going on, is Fabian Nicieza overworked?

"I've got about as much as I can handle without killing myself or committing mayhem on others," he says. "I've had to turn down things—I never thought I would have to do that! I've got many things I like, many books I care about, but I'm aware of my limits and I'm trying to scale back. I gave up *Alpha Flight* partly to make room for *Nomad*. It's a tradeoff, but I'm happy."

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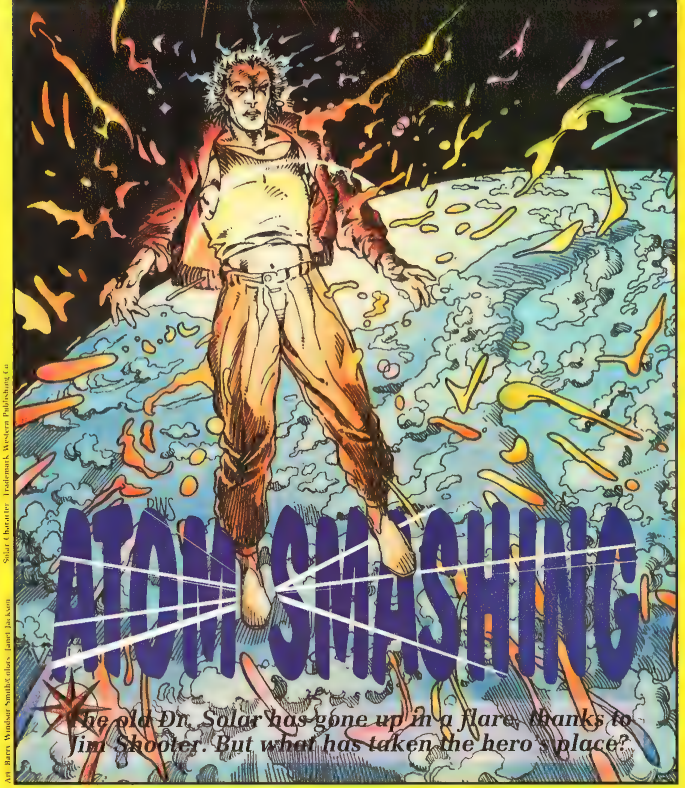


The old Dr. Solar has gone up in a flare, thanks to Jim Shooter. But what has taken the hero's place?

Art: Barry Windsor-Smith & others. Solar Character Trademark, Western Publishing Co.

By PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL

Dr. Solar was basically 'Captain Nuclear Reactor,'" writer Jim Shooter laughs. "'Hey, kids! You can have one of these in *your* backyard.' The only thing that *wasn't* that way was his name—Solar, which conjures images of environmentalism and things like that. But the Sun is a fusion furnace, so that works with the nuclear background."

Shooter, following the success of his revival of *Magnus, Robot Fighter* for Valiant Comics (which he discussed in CS #18), is now turning to Gold Key's other 1960s superhero with *Solar, Man of the Atom*. But getting Solar ready for a '90s audience is a much tougher proposition, the writer admits.

"The first thing we realized is that the original thoughts behind Dr. Solar *don't* play today: they're very naive. People know enough now that the answers they gave back then. 'He's wearing lead-lined clothes: it's OK'—*won't* be accepted. We tried to look at the whole property and sift through it and try to determine what Solar's creators were thinking. What was the point they were after?"

If Solar was that difficult to work out, why make it the second title in the revival? "We felt that the four titles with the best track record—the best known—were *Magnus, Solar, Turok* and *Lost in Space*," Shooter explains. "An informal survey told me those were the ones most people remembered. We started out to redevelop all of them. I took on *Magnus* and *Solar*,

Solar Characters & Art: Copyright 1991 Western Publishing Co. & Valiant Communications Inc

Art: Barry Windsor-Smith/Bob Layton

Jim Shooter says Dr. Solar is now the *well-dressed* "Captain Nuclear Reactor."

other people did *Turok* and *Lost in Space*. I got finished first."

Shooter and his art team—layout man Don Perlin and finisher Bob Layton—decided the creators of the Gold Key Man of the Atom were attempting to be very realistic about their hero, but didn't know enough science to carry it off. "I'm trying to pay much more attention to the science than they did because I know more," Shooter says. "I've been a big reader of that stuff. I didn't go to college, but I was a hardcore science nut in high school; I crammed six years of science into four years of high school. I took a special after-school class every day sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh. I think I can improve the science. I also have a guy on staff here who happens to have a degree in physics. I think we'll be able to do that the way they wished they had done it back then.

"If you look at a lot of '50s and '60s comics, there will be a germ of a good idea and failure to execute it well," Shooter explains. "People got in over their heads. Even Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, when they started *Fantastic Four*, started to do a very realistic thing. But Stan doesn't know any hard science, so they quickly got into unstable molecules, flying cars and costumes. And it's hard to limit Jack to any reality; he just takes off and begins creating universes before your eyes. So, they quickly got into a far-reaching fantasy epic."

As a matter of fact, the writer admits he wants to follow the Lee-Kirby lead with *Solar*. "I want to do a little of what Stan and Jack did with *Fantastic Four*—introduce some powerful science fiction," he says. "I don't want to make one of the mistakes the original folks did: They nailed themselves down to Earth too much in some ways. They started out with spies and saboteurs and never got past that. The old version of Dr. Solar was a real contradiction. This guy was always god-like. He could fly to the Sun or go back in time or split into six little guys and handle six emergencies at once or transmute elements. Then, he would fly home, put his lab coat on, go back to the lab, and everybody would say, 'Nice work, Doc.' You and I know it *wouldn't* play that way.

"I see that as my window into hugescope, broad science fiction –sweeping cosmic stuff," Shooter oberves. "This guy is the original sweeping cosmic character. On the other hand, I see that we have a better ability to handle the science. We'll build a firmer foundation and fly farther from it."

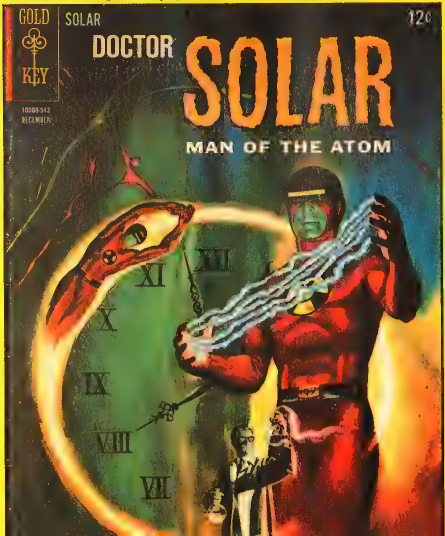
When Shooter moved *Magnus* into the '90s, the task was pretty simple: Just build on the excellent work of Russ Manning. Valiant's *Magnus* picks up pretty much from where Manning left off 25 years before. *Solar* is different, however.

"We have to start from scratch with *Solar* because there are too many problems in what we were left with. Every problem I encountered with *Magnus*, I could explain when I thought about it," he recalls. "Given Dr. Solar—who can transmute elements, time travel, fly to the Sun—you and I know that if he's around for very long, you have a far different world than the one we live in. Many things start changing and that's just a *few* of his powers.

"I can't pick up on a storyline with a character like that having been around a while and no one reacting to it," Shooter points out. "His boss, Dr. Clarkson, just sits there and puffs on a pipe and doesn't seem to realize that he's sitting with a guy who could solve the international balance of trade problem with a sweep of his hand. In a world with Dr. Solar, there would be no Chernobyl, no Three Mile Island.

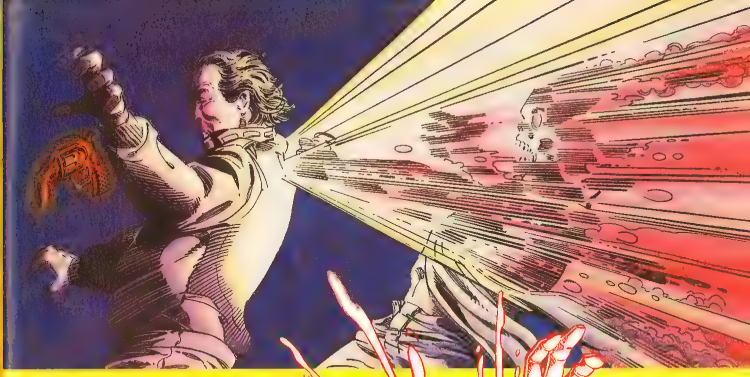
"A friend of mine used to be a nuclear engineer in Russia; he escaped about 18 months ago," Shooter notes. "In broken English, he tells me that Chernobyl is the *least* of the problems there—that *all* of the reactors are old and have low safety standards. There's more wrong than you'll ever read

"Dr. Solar is the original sweeping cosmic character," notes the writer.



Art: D. David Perlin/Bob Layton/Colors: Janet Jackson

Dr. Solar: Art Copyright 1963 Western Publishing Company



A blast from the past heads into the '90s, but Shooter promises that nobody will be around to say, "Nice work, Doc."

about, until one of them blows its cork again. But given Solar, Man of the Atom, that situation couldn't exist. Being the kind of guy he is, he wouldn't allow it. So, I had to take the concepts and start over."

In a marketing move similar to the trading cards featured in *Magnus* #1-8, Solar's origin will be told in 10 six-page chapters, included as extras in the title's first 10 issues, illustrated by fan favorite Barry Windsor-Smith. "Barry has a lot of offers, he doesn't lack for work," Shooter notes. "When I originally talked to him about doing *Solar*, he heard my plans and was very interested. But he couldn't take on the monthly book. So, we came up with a way for him to do the story he really liked—the origin.

"How do you get a guy who can only do so many pages a month to do the origin if you don't want to wait until two years from now to publish the book?" Shooter asks rhetorically. "The answer: We'll serialize the origin inside the regular issues. The origin is dynamite. Barry's building on what I gave him. He understood it completely and took it even farther."

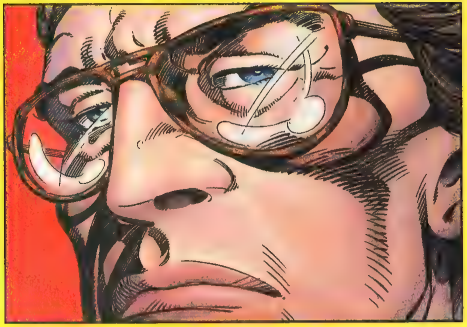
Each six-page origin chapter will include an extra two pages that, when placed with the other nine pieces, compose what Shooter calls "the world's biggest comic book panel," featuring the climax to Solar's origin.

Art: D. David Perlov/Bob Layton

"Solar is *not* a weak personality," says Shooter. "If this guy isn't wrapped reasonably tight, we're in trouble."

But who *is* Solar? What kind of man is he? "Solar himself used to be pretty much central-casting, the Russell Johnson part from many '50s SF movies," Shooter chuckles, alluding to an actor later best known for his role as the Professor on *Gilligan's Island*. And that's an image Shooter wants to dispel. "I've come up with some good role models for him. I had the pleasure of meeting [scientist/science writer] Stephen Jay Gould once. Gould is a great guy, a terrific person. He loves science, there's no doubt about it. It's his job, his hobby. He's really into this stuff—'Let me show you these bones here, they're really great.' Solar is *not* a weak personality. The average writer has this tendency to make scientists dysfunctional in the real world. If Solar is, God

Art: Barry Windsor-Smith/Bob Layton/Colors: Janet Jackson



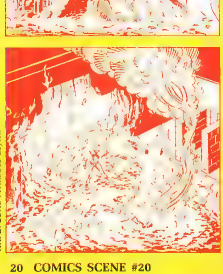
According to Shooter, *Solar* will act as a "foundation" for the Valiant Universe's other titles.

help us all. If this guy isn't wrapped reasonably tight, we're in trouble.

"There are several clichés for scientists: the nerd with the glasses and the pocket full of pencils; the rumpled looking guy with the patches on his elbows; the guy with the plaid shirt and the untied tennis shoe," Shooter remarks. "I don't see Solar that way at all. He's smart, very good at what he does, very focused on it, probably doesn't have much of a life outside that. But he's not painfully shy or anything. We discussed how he would dress: I think he probably doesn't spend much time shopping, so he comes out wearing something fairly hip. Why? Because you have to go *out of your way* to dress like a nerd. You can't walk into Bloomie's and come out with that look."

While keeping some of the names,

Hoping *Solar* follows the Lee-Kirby lead, Shooter wants to "introduce some powerful science fiction."



Art: D. David Perlov/Bob Layton

Shooter has built a new supporting cast for the Man of the Atom. "There is a Dr. Clarkson character, who is very much like a man I know—a smart man, a good administrator, but not exactly a fearless fellow. He will take the path of greatest comfort, least resistance—which is, to me, what Dr. Clarkson was always portrayed as: an avuncular guy who I never found to be as aggressive as he might have been," Shooter says. "Then, there's Gail, who I think we have made a far deeper personality than the woman who was the professional hostage in the original series. She's going to be a focus of many of these stories."

The early issues of *Solar* will all tie tightly to the origin, Shooter says. The first four-issue arc, "Second Death," will focus on ideas also brought up in the four origin chapters in those issues; the same is true of the following arc, which concentrates on a supporting cast member. The climax of *Solar* #10 will also relate to the origin's finale.

And all those stories will be tied into other Valiant comics, including *Magnus* and the forthcoming *Turok, Son of Stone*. "The story of Solar is a foundation for the rest of it. We're making this into a *consistent* universe; each book will relate to all the others," Shooter says.

"I don't think I'm giving away any state secrets by saying that Solar is still alive in the year 4000 and will be appearing in *Magnus*. Our Turok is a modern-day character who goes back into the past—Solar's responsible for that; he's the one who opens that way. Turok may never know that and the reader need not be aware of it to enjoy *Turok*—but anybody who reads all the books will make the connection. They may both appear in each other's books."

Future tie-ins may include the "Aliens" back-up strip from the Gold Key *Magnus* run, the Gold Key version of *Lost in Space*, and possibly one other former Gold Key hero, Mighty Samson—*if* Jim Shooter can find a premise. "Many people have asked me about Mighty Samson," he admits. "We just haven't come up with anything good enough yet. There have been an awful lot of these post-apocalyptic futures done recently, so unless I can come up with something special, I don't want to just go and do it. We'll probably do at least another two titles in the early fall. We have some of our own characters—completely original—that will fit in here as well. I *like* universe-building." CS

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King of the Rocket Men **marked an end to the great Republic serials.**

By DAN SCAPPEROTTI

When Dave Stevens' comic book creation *The Rocketeer* jets across the screen in Disney's big summer spectacular, he'll only be the latest in a string of jet-propelled heroes to blast onto celluloid. The Rocketeer traces his ancestry directly back to the Saturday matinee serial screens and the pages of various Fawcett Comics.

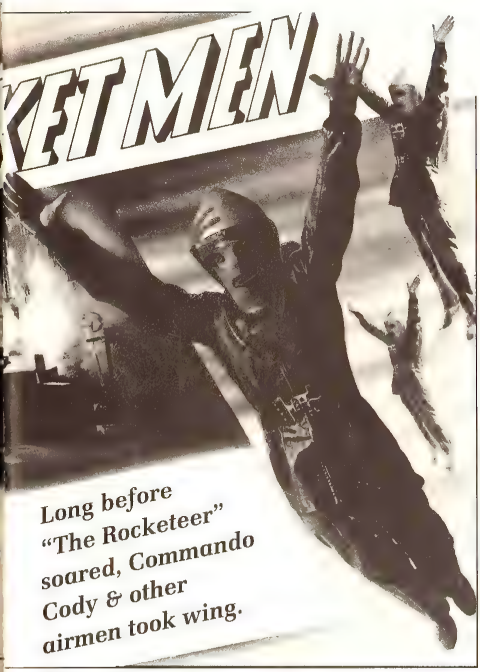
The start of the 1940s saw the emergence of a new superhero, created by Jon Small. Bulletman, whose other identity was ballistics expert Jim Barr, a cop dedicated to wiping out crime. Using a secret formula that gave him superhuman strength and intellect, Barr invented a bullet-shaped helmet that allowed him to defy gravity, fly and become Bulletman. His helmet covered most of his head while leaving his face open.

Fawcett Publishing originally showcased Bulletman's adventures in *Nickel Comics* starting in May 1940. The following year, the flying detective had his own title, which ran for 16 issues and included work by such legendary comics artists as Jack Kirby, C.C. Beck and Joe Simon, and continued appearing in *Master Comics* and other Fawcett books.

As Bulletman's regular comics career came to an end in September 1949, a new flying character hit the nation's movie screens. For bristling excitement and non-stop action, the serials from Republic Pictures couldn't be beat. Although the studio had been producing the most thrilling, action-packed cliffhangers for 13 years, post-war life had taken its toll on theater attendance. Production costs were mounting. After two years of routine serials mainly featuring the escapades of Zorro and Jesse James, Republic's team of writers devised a flying character based on the scientific fancies of the late '40s. But the studio's corporate lawyers were ready to throw a monkey wrench into the works. With Superman and Captain Marvel's publishers still locked in a major copyright infringement lawsuit, Republic's attorneys urged caution when developing a flying superhero. Associate producer Franklin Adreon convinced the legal staff that their character was original, hailing neither from another planet nor the supernatural.

King of the Rocket Men went before the cameras on April 6, 1949 with a 22-day shooting schedule and a budget of $164,984. It was destined to be the last of the great Republic serials. The 12 chapters featured Tristram Coffin as Jeff King, a jet propulsion expert with Science Associates. The hero role was a change of pace for the mustachioed Coffin, who had been playing the villain in such Republic serials as *Perils of Nyoka*, *Spy Smasher* and *Jesse James Rides Again*.

When a series of unlikely "accidents" take the lives of several association members, King is appointed

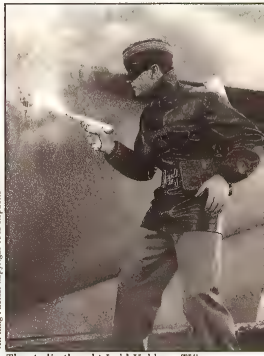


Long before "The Rocketeer" soared, Commando Cody & other airmen took wing.

All King Photos Copyright 1949 Republic Pictures

Lydecker, Republic's special FX masters. In the field of miniature special FX, the Lydecker brothers were unsurpassed even by the major studios. As heads of the special FX unit, the Lydeckers were no strangers to flying human figures. In 1936, they had sent the batmen of the lost city of Joba aloft to menace Clyde Beatty in Republic's first serial, *Darkest Africa*. By 1941, the unit's miniature work was so advanced that they could convincingly film a superhero flying after the Scorpion's minions in *The Adventures of Captain Marvel*.

King of the Rocket Men's flying sequences were not to be equalled until *Superman: The Movie* hit screens in 1978. With his leather jacket, rocket



The studio thought Judd Holdren, TV's Commando Cody, could be replaced if necessary. That's why he wore a Lone Ranger-style mask.

to look into the matter. He's soon on the trail of the mysterious Dr. Vulcan, a mad scientist out to exploit the association's inventions.

Dr. Millard, thought to have been killed in a lab explosion, is still alive and, with King's help, has set up a lab inside a mountain cave. Millard invents a jet-propelled flying suit, which King dons to aid in his search for Dr. Vulcan's true identity. Dubbed "Rocket Man" by the newspapers, he decides to keep his identity a secret to prevent Dr. Vulcan from learning the invention's source. Chapter after chapter, Dr. Vulcan tries to outwit his flying nemesis while plotting to gain control of the Sonic Decimator, a device that turns mountains into rivers of molten lava.

The fantastic flying sequences were devised by Howard and Theodore

Tristram Coffin (right) played the villain in several Republic chapterplays before being named *King of the Rocket Men*.

Movie Republic Serial Photos, Courtesy Dan Scapperotti

All Radar Men Photos Copyright 1951 Republic Pictures

George Wallace marshalled the skies as the first Commando Cody in *Radar Men from the Moon.*

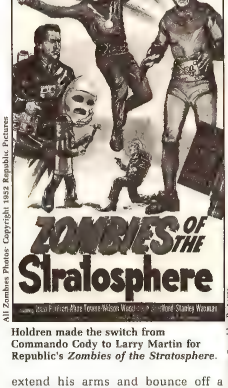
tubes strapped to his back and a bullet-shaped helmet, Rocket Man blasted off weekly in some of the most thrilling flying footage ever seen.

Chapter 1 ends in an especially exciting way. Vulcan's men hijack a truck carrying an aerial torpedo. Rocket Man flies after them, roaring through the skies above the rolling hills. Spotting the truck, he comes flying down the hill, passing just to the camera's right, and lands in the back of the moving truck. During the fight that follows, the missile is inadvertently launched and Rocket Man must fly after the deadly projectile before it explodes in a populated area.

To create the flying effects, the Lydeckers replaced Tristram Coffin with an almost life-sized dummy attached to wires. The wires were strung between the Hollywood hills and filmed using natural light, which provided a realistic tableau. The sound FX of the rocket packs, sounding like a high-speed jet in flight, added to the illusion.

Rocket Man fights Vulcan's henchmen in every chapter, with most of the action footage featuring stunt ace Dave Sharpe either under the helmet or as the bad guy battling the hero. Sharpe, who had also doubled for Tom Tyler as Captain Marvel in the earlier serial, once commented, "It was considered very unethical for a star and a stuntman in the star's wardrobe to sit even remotely closely together in the commissary at lunch. We were creating a great illusion."

A different helmet was used during the extensive stunt work and Sharpe's face plate was made of a gauze material to prevent injury. Sharpe would set the controls on the front of his jacket ("On," "Up," "Fast"), run a few feet,



All Zombies Photos Copyright 1952 Republic Pictures

Holdren made the switch from Commando Cody to Larry Martin for Republic's *Zombies of the Stratosphere.*

extend his arms and bounce off a springboard into the air. There would be a blast of smoke from his rocket tubes as he leapt past camera. Wires concealed inside the jacket sleeves operated the smoke mechanism, and extending the arms triggered the device.

Each chapter of *Rocket Men* featured the spectacular combination of FX and Sharpe's athletic prowess. One highlight occurs toward the end of Chapter 12, in which Dr. Vulcan and his henchmen use the Sonic Decimator to attack New York City (fantastic FX footage from RKO's 1933 end-of-the-world epic *Deluge*). Rocket Man flies out to their island base, roars down a mountain, streaks across the lawn and crashes through the window. Inside the house, he somersaults into a landing and blasts the infernal machine with a ray gun before engaging the criminals in a wild fist fight.

Later, Republic released a re-edited feature version of the serial with the meaningless new title *Lost Planet Airmen.* Despite *Rocket Men*'s success, however, the studio did not rush forward with another Jeff King adventure.

It was more than two years before Republic president Herbert J. Yates ordered the character's reincarnation as Commando Cody, Sky Marshal of the Universe. Cody would use the same flying suit introduced in *Rocket Men.* The Sky Marshal was scheduled to debut in the proposed 12-chapter serial *Planet Men From Mars,* but before the cameras rolled in October 1951, the serial underwent several changes, including location and the title to *Radar Men from the Moon.* (Republic later retitled it *Retik the Moon Menace* for release as a feature version in 1966.) Yates had wanted a character that could be merchandised to the nation's kids and hoped Commando Cody would fit the bill.

Actor George Wallace (see page 27) was picked to star as Commando Cody, wearing Rocket Man's helmet and jacket. A government agent alerts Cody that the nation's defenses are being bombarded by mysterious forces.

All Commando Cody Photos Copyright 1952 Republic Pictures

Commando Cody's foes were never at a loss for finding ways to annoy him.

ROCKETMAN

KING OF THE ROCKET MEN

All Rocketman Art: Chris Moeller/Courtesy Innovation

King of the Rocket Men blasts into comics form, but writer/artist Chris Moeller says don't expect many "stupid" cliffhangers.

While *The Rocketeer* blasts its way across the screen this summer, Innovation Comics is releasing a four-issue adaptation of the 1949 Republic Pictures serial, *King of the Rocket Men*. Writing and illustrating the mini-series is Chris Moeller, one of Innovation's *Lost in Space* artists.

"Innovation got the *King of Rocket Men* license from Carolco [which licenses Republic Pictures material], and it sounded like it was the right project for me," says Moeller, who adds that this is his *first* comics project. "I have a lot of control over the book's look; I'm also doing the adaptation covers, helping design a logo, layouts and everything."

Innovation provided the writer/artist with a copy of *Rocket Men* and asked him to adapt the story straight from the 12-chapter serial. "I watched them all and broke [the serial] down into four parts. Then, I just updated it for my own look. I changed Jeff King's suit and did stuff [Republic] couldn't do. They didn't have a budget for certain things in the movies, but you can do them in comics, because it doesn't cost you anything to build a huge set.

"There are many things that I find interesting about the comic," he continues. "I'm setting it with a '40s look, even though it's not *particularly* the '40s. The series lends itself to that, because it only makes a reference to the real world *once*, when it talks about New York City. Other than that, it could be set on another planet in the '40s. I was thinking about going really wild with the series, but I decided to play it fairly straight."

Playing it straight didn't mean sticking to the serial verbatim, however. "I changed much of the dialogue," Moeller explains. "When you transcribe what they actually say, the story doesn't really hang together well, so I changed that. Also, I'm interested in mythology, so there's a lot of good mythological stuff that I'm playing up a little here, like why the bad guy chose the name Dr. Vulcan. I've read about Vulcan in Roman mythology, so I'm using things like visual symbologies."

Translating *Rocket Men*'s cliffhangers into comics was another matter. "They have a lot of really stupid cliffhangers in [the serial], because they had to have certain people come back every week. I'm basically preserving the cliffhangers between each of the four issues, playing them down in the stories, because they don't really mean much. So, there are little plot changes here and there," he asserts, "but I am pretty much sticking close to the serial."

Is publishing this *King of the Rocket Men* mini-series a way of taking advantage of *The Rocketeer*'s release? Are they cashing in on that film? "Well, definitely, yeah, sure, why not?" Moeller laughs. "I mean, it's good timing, and that's not a coincidence. I'm sure that there are many *Rocket Men*-type things coming out right now. After all, when *Star Wars* came out, there was all this science-fiction stuff, and when everybody heard that *The Abyss* was going to be a big movie, then you suddenly had all these [underwater-based] movies."

Moeller decided on a "fairly straight" *Rocket Men* adaptation, but admits, "I was thinking about going really wild with the series."

If sales are high, Innovation could offer readers new Rocket Man adventures or adaptations of such similar Republic serials as *Radar Men of the Moon* and *Zombies of the Stratosphere*. Chris Moeller, though, isn't sure what the future holds. "I don't know," he confesses. "I don't know how the licensing works. I'm sure that if this one's successful, they'll probably try to get other ones, and if they can, that would be *great*!"

Michael McAvennie

Should *King of the Roc* Moeller make a movie?

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Before playing Sue Davis in *Zombies of the Stratosphere*, Aline Towne was Cody's secretary Joan in the TV series.

Leonard Nimoy (left) was one of the *Zombies of the Stratosphere* before *Star Trek*.

Tracing the source of the attacks, he learns that there has been atomic activity on the Moon. Using his newly designed spaceship, Cody and his associates blast off for lunar adventure.

Landing among the rocky crags of the Moon's surface, Cody discovers a walled city (stock footage of Joba from *Darkest Africa*). The bullet-shaped helmet served a dual purpose in *Radar Men* since it incorporated an oxygen supply, allowing Cody to breathe on the Moon. It also distinguished him from the Lunarians, whose space suits were the more traditional types showcased in *Destination Moon*.

Upon entering the city, Cody meets Retik, the Moon's ruler, played by veteran serial and Western badman Roy Barcroft. The actor appears sporting the same cowl he used as the Martian menace in Republic's 1945 serial *The Purple Monster Strikes*. This outfit allowed the studio to match the footage of Barcroft from the previous serial (i.e. its explosive finale).

The dictator explains to Cody that the Moon's thinning air makes it necessary for a full-scale migration to the Earth. His attacks were meant to weaken Earth's defenses prior to invasion.

Escaping from Retik's lair, Cody returns to his laboratory and prepares to battle the Moon's forces on Earth. The serial's low budget ($172,840), however, allowed for only a trio of primary henchmen: Moonman Krog and his two main Earthling henchmen, Daly and Graber. Graber was played by Clayton Moore, TV's Lone Ranger (CS #9), who had temporarily left that series in a contract dispute.

Extensive use of stock footage of the flying sequences allowed Republic to keep the budget in check, but the FX team wasn't idle. Utilizing the same techniques used in *Rocket Men*, they designed a spaceship that took off horizontally and had it lifting off and landing, both on Earth and the lunar surface. Although trite by today's standards, these scenes hold up better than most of the period's low-budget features. Unfortunately, *Radar Men from the Moon* isn't one of Republic's better serials. In today's hi-tech world, the film dates badly and the lapses of logic that may have been overlooked 40 years ago are glaring.

The first wave of cinematic science fiction enthusiasm generated by *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *The Thing* and *Destination Moon* was sweeping the country, and Republic prexy Yates didn't intend to be left out or to let dust settle on the battered flying suit. Yates foresaw the importance of television, especially to studios that produced the theatrical "B" features and were already geared for the lower-cost medium.

Despite such titles as "Cosmic Vengeance," Commando Cody's TV adventures were never "Continued Next Week."

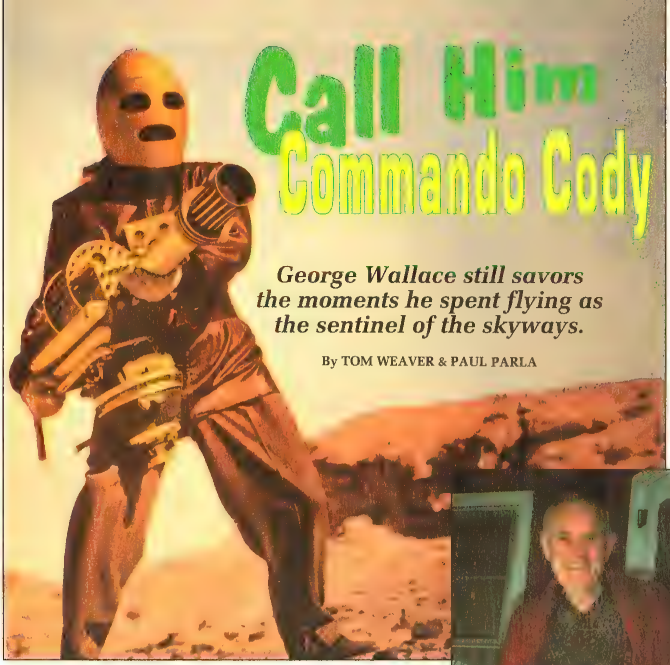
Commando Cody, Sky Marshal of the Universe was the result. Cody clashes with the Ruler, an interplanetary outlaw who, for 12 unsuccessful TV series episodes, tries to conquer Earth. Judd Holdren replaced George Wallace as Cody, who showed up this time wearing a Lone Ranger-style mask. Holdren was fresh from his portrayal of Captain Video, the title character in the Columbia serial, and would go on to another outer-space adventure as Rex Barrow in the 1953 serial *The Lost Planet*. Gregory Gay, who was cast as the interplanetary outlaw, was no stranger to alien roles, having tried to subjugate the planet once before as the Martian Mota in Republic's 1951 cliffhanger *Flying Disc Man from Mars*.

Although produced by the studio's serial unit, the series differed from the chapterplays in that each episode was complete in itself, dropping the "Continued Next Week" format. Segments sported the intriguing, pulpy titles "Enemies of the Universe," "Atomic Peril," "Cosmic Vengeance," "Nightmare Typhoon," "War of the Space Giants," "Destroyers of the Sun," "Robot Monster of Mars," "Hydrogen Hurricane," "Solar Sky Riders," "S.O.S. Ice Age," "Lost in Outer Space" and "Captives of the Zero Hour."

Apparently, the Ruler was never at a loss for ways to annoy Earth's inhabitants. In "Nightmare Typhoon," he seeds the clouds with a strange chemical that produced deadly storms and floods. A mineral found on Saturn allows the Ruler to attack with germ capsules in "War of the Space Giants." By Episode 6, "Destroyers of the Sun," he discovers a way to *extinguish* the Sun. Thwarted in his efforts to conquer our world, the Ruler devises a plan to use the Moon as a guided missile and send it crashing into Earth in "Hydrogen Hurricane." Episode 9, "Solar Sky Riders," sees a new villainous ap-

(continued on page 32)

Call Him Commando Cody



All Radar Men Photos Copyright 1951 Republic Pictures

George Wallace still savors the moments he spent flying as the sentinel of the skyways.

By TOM WEAVER & PAUL PARLA

At age 13, George Wallace was working in a West Virginia coal mine; years later, he was up for the New York Drama Critics Award for playing the male lead in Broadway's *New Girl in Town*. In between, he saved Earth from devastating conquest and lunar invasion in the serial *Radar Men from the Moon* as that retro-Rocketeer, Commando Cody.

The New York City-born Wallace, who played the inventor of the flying suit in *Radar Men*, doesn't hesitate to talk about his upbringing during the Great Depression, or the fact that as a kid he didn't get the chance to go to high school. "I *started* to go to high school in Far Rockaway, Queens, but that was right after the Depression, 1933 or '34. I just couldn't afford to finish school, because I had no dad—he left when I was six months old. I never saw my father; it was just my mother and me. So, I had to go to work. I finished three months of high school, and that was it.

"Then, my mother remarried when I was 13—a coal miner from West Virginia. As soon as she married him, we packed up and moved from Far Rockaway to outside of Wheeling, a place called McMechen, a coal mining town. I started to work in the coal mines, and I've been workin' ever since."

Wallace joined the Navy in 1936 and got out by 1940, although when World War II got underway, he was right back in again. ("I was chief bosun's mate in the Navy, which is like a master sergeant in the Army.") Beaching himself in LA after eight years in the service, Wallace supported himself with an array of odd jobs, which included working for a meat packer ("knockin' steers in the head"), a lumberjack in the High Sierras, a truck driver and a bouncer.

"I think *Radar Men from the Moon* is a *gas*," says George D. Wallace.

"Finally, I became a bartender here in Hollywood," recalls Wallace. "In the Navy, I always liked to sing, so when I would tend bar, I used to sing along with the jukebox. That was always good for a tip. One day, a guy came in and had a drink, and when he was

Forbidden Planet Photo Copyright 1956 MGM

Wallace's (far right) experience as a bosun's mate in the Navy allowed him access to the *Forbidden Planet*.

leaving, he gave me his card and said, 'Call me tomorrow.' The card said Jimmy Fiddler, who was a famous Hollywood columnist—the Walter Winchell of the West Coast. I went to see him, and he asked me, 'How would you like to sing in a Jewish benefit?' I said, 'I'm not Jewish.' He said, 'Who cares?' "

Fiddler introduced Wallace to Mickey Katz (Joel Grey's father), who played the clarinet at Jewish benefits. "I started singing with Mickey Katz, but after a while, somebody said, 'You better take lessons; you don't know how to sing.' So, I started to study with an instructor, 'paying' her for my lessons by taking care of her yard and her house. Then, I went to dramatic school on my G.I. Bill of Rights to help my singing, and that's how I got in the business."

Wallace enrolled in drama school and earned his living during the day by tending the greens at MGM during movies like *The Sea of Grass*, *Green Dolphin Street* (1947) and *The Kissing Bandit* (1948). His first TV role was as an Army sergeant in an episode of one of TV's earliest filmed dramatic shows, *Fireside Theatre*—a performance which won him the Sylvania Television Award. Small parts in movies (*The Sun Sets at Dawn*, *Up Front*, *The Fat Man*) followed before Wallace landed his "signature" role as two-fisted super-scientist Commando Cody in the Republic serial *Radar Men from the Moon*.

"I was with a small English agent who sent me out to Republic for a role as a heavy in *Radar Men from the Moon*," the actor recalls. "I went out around 10 a.m. and spoke to the producers, and they asked, 'Do you have any film of yourself?' I said, 'Yes, a *Fireside Theatre*, which won me an award.' They said, 'We would like to look at it. Just hang around.' So, they

"It's hard to relate *Radar Men* to today's SF films," Wallace admits. "We didn't have the equipment or the knowledge."

sent for the film, and in the meantime, I was getting very upset just hanging around—they kept me there all afternoon, just to get a crummy part in *Radar Men* as a heavy! They called me in again about 3:00 and said, 'We saw the film. How would you like to be Commando Cody?' "

Seizing the starring role, Wallace and the rest of the *Radar Men* company began production on the 12-chapter serial October 17, 1951, with Wallace as Cody (no first name, not even among his on-screen friends), Aline Towne as loyal Girl Friday Joan Gilbert and William Bakewell as lab assistant Ted Richards. Furnishing the film's requisite villainy, Roy Barcroft climbed back into his old Purple Monster tights as Retik, Ruler of the Moon, bent on waging war with the Earth and beginning the Moonmen's mass migration from Luna's barren, sunlit(!) surface to our greener world. Clayton (*Lone Ranger*) Moore (CS #9) took fifth billing as Graber, a terran ex-convict employed by the Moonmen (the part for which Wallace was being originally considered).

"Aline Towne and Billy Bakewell were such nice people," Wallace remembers. "We did a lot of stuff that actors today just wouldn't *do*; in those days, you just *did* it, it was part of the job. So, we became a unit, a group, and we go! along just wonderfully. Roy Barcroft had been well-known as a Western heavy for so many years and he was a big, lovable bear, a sweetheart of a guy. And Clayton was just fine, except in one of the fight scenes, he accidentally broke my nose! We all had fun in those days."

Scenes of Cody and Ted (Wallace and Bakewell) fighting the Moonmen's agents in their own earthly backyards were shot at or around Republic Studios, but scenes set amidst the Moon's rocks and cliffs were shot at Red Rock Canyon, a rugged area in the desert outside of Los Angeles. "Up in Red Rock Canyon, it was 112 degrees in the daytime, and you sweated quite a bit while running around in that hot weather wearing the heavy leather jacket and all this other stuff. We had to stay out there all week to shoot. We would start first thing in the morning, as soon as the Sun came up, and work until the Sun went down that night."

A highlight of *Radar Men from the Moon* is, of course, the flying scenes, most (if not all of them) culled from the earlier serial *King of the Rocket Men*. New close-up shots of Wallace's Commando Cody in airborne action, however, were filmed in front of a rear-projection screen. "For the scenes where Cody's flying through the clouds, they sent a plane up and took shots of clouds going by," Wallace explains. "Then, they rear-projected this footage onto a screen, and I would work in front of the screen. They built a platform just off-camera and attached a 2x4 to it, extending it out into camera range maybe three feet. Very easily, I would crawl out onto this 2x4, on my belly, and then they would close my jacket around the 2x4. And there I would be, 'flying' in front of those clouds. But sometimes—quite a *few* times!—I would lose my balance and flip, and I would be hanging upside down by my jacket, off this 2x4!

"Then, there were my takeoff scenes. They had a trampoline just in front of the camera, and I would jump, hit the trampoline, go sailing past the camera and land in a big heap on a couple of mattresses. Then, the director [Fred Brannon] said, 'George, you're not flying straight up; you're flying level. We want you to fly more straight-up.' So, they put up a high bar about eight feet off the ground. Now I would be bouncing off the trampoline and jumping up past the camera for the high bar—which was a good shot. I would grab the high bar and my feet would swing free, 'cause I was clear of the ground. But being so hot and sweaty, I would lose my grip every so often and fall down onto my back!"

The actor tried out as a *Radar Men* heavy, but left the audition as Commando Cody.

Most Republic Serial Photos: Courtesy Dan Scapperotti

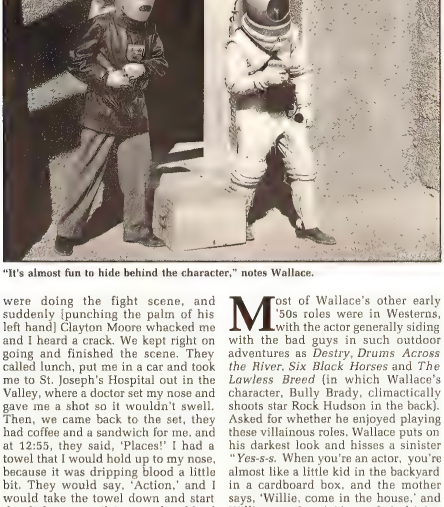
Radar Men's futuristic props, simplistic by today's hi-tech standards but still highly effective, included Cody's bus-sized spaceship and a compact tank in which the evil Moonmen pursue the hero across the rocky lunarscape.

"The first time you see the rocketship is in Chapter 1," says Wallace, "when Aline, Billy and I drive up to it with a couple of cops who are seeing us off. The thing was probably 20 feet long and maybe eight feet high. It was just a front, a facade, not circular all around. Then, they had a smaller rocketship, maybe 10 feet long, on a wire which they had strung up between a couple of cliff rocks. They would stick a sparkler in the rear end of it, give it a shove and down it would go. For the

scenes on the Moon, where Retik's henchmen were chasing after us in their tank, they took an old Chevy or something and built a plywood silhouette of a tank around it."

No Republic serial would be truly complete without a fistfight in every chapter, and in these once-a-reel brawls, Wallace was generally doubled by stunt ace Tom Steele (STARLOG #137). Two of *Radar Men*'s fistic encounters were set in a restaurant, with Wallace and Bakewell taking on baddie Clayton Moore and his criminal companion, Bob Stevenson.

"Because it was one of the fights in the restaurant," Wallace explains, "I didn't have the Commando Cody flying helmet on. It was about 11:55 when we



"It's almost fun to hide behind the character," notes Wallace.

were doing the fight scene, and suddenly [punching the palm of his left hand] Clayton Moore whacked me and I heard a crack. We kept right on going and finished the scene. They called lunch, put me in a car and took me to St. Joseph's Hospital out in the Valley, where a doctor set my nose and gave me a shot so it wouldn't swell. Then, we came back to the set, they had coffee and a sandwich for me, and at 12:55, they said, 'Places!' I had a towel that I would hold up to my nose, because it was dripping blood a little bit. They would say, 'Action,' and I would take the towel down and start the dialogue, until it started to bleed again. But, so that we wouldn't lose five minutes, we kept right on going, me with a broken nose!" he laughs.

Less than four months after the filming of *Radar Men*, the character of Cody was back in front of the cameras for the Republic TV series *Commando Cody—Sky Marshal of the Universe*. It wasn't Wallace playing the role of Cody, however, but Judd Holdren, once serialdom's Captain Video. Wallace wasn't offered the part.

"I saw *Radar Men* again maybe a year ago," he admits. "Every so often, I have somebody over and they want to look at a chapter or two. I think it's a *gas*. It's hard to relate *Radar Men* to the science fiction films of today—we didn't have the equipment or the knowledge. But I think that what we did, for that time, was good. The dialogue was hokey, but back then, it fit. And if people liked it, that was the important thing."

Most of Wallace's other early '50s roles were in Westerns, with the actor generally siding with the bad guys in such outdoor adventures as *Destry*, *Drums Across the River*, *Six Black Horses* and *The Lawless Breed* (in which Wallace's character, Bully Brady, climactically shoots star Rock Hudson in the back). Asked for whether he enjoyed playing these villainous roles, Wallace puts on his darkest look and hisses a sinister "*Yes-s-s*. When you're an actor, you're almost like a little kid in the backyard in a cardboard box, and the mother says, 'Willie, come in the house,' and Willie says, 'I can't,' 'cause he's driving that cardboard box 100 miles an hour and can't go in right now! Being a heavy, you can bring to it a limp, an eyepatch; you can snarl, grow a beard and do all type of things that maybe you always wanted to do as a kid. It's almost fun to hide behind the character, the makeup."

What Wallace really wanted to do, however, was sing, an opportunity he has never had in films. So when Broadway beckoned, he answered the call. He Broadway-debuted in Richard Rodgers' *Pipe Dream*, replaced John Raitt in *Pajama Game*, and was award-nominated for his leading role in *New Girl in Town*, a musical version of *Anna Christie* with Gwen Verdon (all in the '50s). Other stage roles have included *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*, playing opposite Ginger Rogers in Dallas, *Jennie* with Mary Martin, *The Most Happy Fella* (during production of which he met his present wife Jane A. Johnston, of Mel Brooks' *When Things Were Rotten*), *Camelot*, *Man of La Mancha* and *Company*.

Wallace never played Commando Cody again, but he did take a second trip into space in 1955 when he joined the crew of the United Planets Cruiser C-57-D on their trip to MGM's *Forbidden Planet*. "A man named Leonard Murphy was casting *Forbidden Planet*, and I went in for an interview. He said, 'George, when you were here several years ago [as a greensman], I heard that you were a bosun's mate in the Navy.' That's how I got the part; he remembered I was a bosun's mate and they needed one in the film!" Wallace laughs.

"The spaceship and the planet surface were built on Stage 15, which was the largest stage at MGM," he recalls. "Way at the end of the stage, they had the backdrop, the skies in the distance. I was very aware of the bushes and things, because years before, that had been my job. Near the spaceship, the few little bushes they had were maybe two and a half, three feet high. As you looked out in the 'distance' across the stage, the bushes were smaller and smaller and smaller, to give the set more depth. Then, they had a couple of midgets in spacesuits back there, to complete the illusion. It seemed that you were looking out for miles!

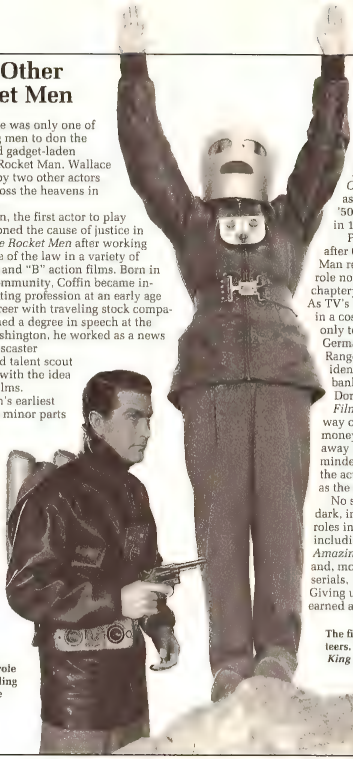
"Inside Robby the Robot, they [originally] had a guy who used to be a child actor, Frankie Darro. In the old pictures, he used to play jockeys, little tough guys, roles like that, but as the years went on, he couldn't get a job and he ended up inside Robby the Robot. During lunch, I guess Frankie would belt down a few. After lunch, we would go back to working, and Robby would come walking into a scene and stop, then start to waver back and forth a little bit. And then suddenly, Robby would fall over backwards, 'cause Frankie got a little drunk and would fall over under the costume's weight! So, they fired him and they got somebody else [Frankie

The Other Rocket Men

George Wallace was only one of *three* leading men to don the bullet helmet and gadget-laden leather jacket of Rocket Man. Wallace being bracketed by two other actors who streaked across the heavens in their own serials.

Tristram Coffin, the first actor to play the role, championed the cause of justice in 1949's *King of the Rocket Men* after working on the *wrong* side of the law in a variety of Westerns, serials and "B" action films. Born in a Utah mining community, Coffin became interested in the acting profession at an early age and began his career with traveling stock companies. Having earned a degree in speech at the University of Washington, he worked as a news analyst and sportscaster until a Hollywood talent scout approached him with the idea of appearing in films.

Some of Coffin's earliest movie roles were minor parts in serials like *Dick Tracy's G-Men* and *The Green Hornet Strikes Again*, but the actor soon built himself up to co-starring stints in programmers at Columbia, Monogram and Republic. Coffin's sinister looks served him well in the kind of roles he played in serials like *Perils of Nyoka* and *Spy Smasher*, but there were also occasional changes-of-pace, like his heroic role (opposite Bela Lugosi) in *The Corpse Vanishes*, a D.A. strangled by a zombie in *Creature with the Atom Brain*, a space agency official in *The Crawling Hand* and his regular TV gig as the Arizona Ranger Captain in the '50s Western series *26 Men*. Coffin died in 1990.



Judd Holdren assumed the Commando Cody role for TV before tackling the *Zombies of the Stratosphere*.

Commando Cody Photos:1952 Republic Pictures

The first of several rocketeers. Tristram Coffin was *King of the Rocket Men*.

King Photo©Copy Right 1949 Republic Pictures

Patrolling America's threatened skies after George Wallace hung up his Rocket Man regalia, Judd Holdren assumed the role not only on television, but in his own chapterplay *(Zombies of the Stratosphere)*. As TV's Commando Cody, Holdren dressed in a costume which one critic called "true only to a wardrobe mistress' concept of the German High Command" and wore a Lone Ranger-style mask—*not* to protect his true identity, but to safeguard Republic's bank accounts. As Holdren explained to Don Glut in *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, "The mask was the studio's way of insuring against my wanting more money some day and threatening to walk away from the series. Some economy-minded official had the brilliant idea that the actor could always be replaced as long as the mask remained!"

No stranger to fantasy film fans, the dark, intense Holdren also enjoyed small roles in a number of other genre films, including *Rocketship X-M*, *Francis*, *The Amazing Colossal Man*, *Space Master X-7* and, more notoriously, a pair of Columbia serials, *Captain Video* and *The Lost Planet*. Giving up show biz in the late '50s, Holdren earned a living in the insurance business for several years before his death in 1974.

—*Tom Weaver*

Carpenter] and put him into the robot."

The actor's opinion of SF in general is that "it's great, because all the stories have a futuristic theme to them. When I was a kid, we would look at the comic books, and they would be full of rays and rockets and this and that, all beyond our scope at that time. Today, here they are: We *go* to the Moon, we *have* lasers, we *have* this and that. Look at the [Persian Gulf] war that just finished: A tank shooting another tank 30 miles away! So I think science fiction is great, very inventive and a terrific look at things that could be in the future. I enjoy it."

Wallace's career was stalled in 1960 when a horse he was riding on TV's *Swamp Fox* series reared and fell on him, breaking his back. After a painful seven-month recovery, film and TV offers were slow to come in, since Wallace was now considered a risk. He returned to the theater and drove a cab in order to make ends meet while the incident passed from memory.

More recently, genre credits for Wallace have been scarce outside of TV, where he played a general in the 1973 TV movie *The Six Million Dollar Man* and a captured human in the '70s teleseries *Planet of the Apes*. "The poor people playing the apes were constantly sweating," he remembers, "because they were under all that makeup and wardrobe. Roddy McDowall had to stop shooting every day about noon. He was allergic to the makeup and the spirit gum and all that stuff, and a heavy rash would break out if he worked any longer. That was interesting to do, though."

These days he calls himself George D. Wallace, to avoid confusion with the black comic George Wallace (not to mention Alabama's ex-governor). His

(continued on page 32)

The actor thinks SF is "great, because all the stories have a futuristic theme."

Wallace

(continued from page 31)

'80s films have included *The Stunt Man*, *Protocol*, *Just Between Friends*, *Native Son*, *Punchline*, *Prison* and *Defending Your Life* (as a judge). In TV, he was most recently featured as a regular on CBS' *Sons and Daughters*. Less was seen of his character, Grandpa Hank, when the series moved from an early-evening, family-oriented time slot to 10 p.m., with adult themes ("all the young people in bed and having sex") prevailing. Frequently pre-empted by Gulf War coverage and other special events, viewership dwindled and the show was axed.

Despite a 40-year career in the business and having racked up some impressive stage credits, genre fans continue to think of George Wallace as Commando Cody, protector of America's imperiled skyways. Is our somewhat lowbrow orientation an annoyance to him? "No, I think it's just fantastic," Wallace grins. "A few years ago, I went to Knoxville, Tennessee, for the annual Riders of the Silver Screen Western convention.

"I was at an autograph table, and I looked up and saw two big guys in line, about 6' 3", big beards, dirty T-shirts, just staring at me. Gradually, they came closer and closer in the line, looking like they're going to tear me in half. They finally got up to me and leaned forward onto the table, looked me in the face and one of 'em said, 'You've *always* been our hero.' They told me that, as kids, they wanted to make Rocket Man helmets! I'm awed and very pleased that after that long a time, people still remember, still care. I think that's just great."

Many of *Zombies*' flying scenes were stock footage—but not this one.

Photo Copyright 1952 Republic Pictures.

Rocket Men

(continued from page 26)

proach: Since his plan to extinguish the Sun had failed several episodes back, he decides to *broil* the Earth with an abundance of suns.

After filming the first three *Commando Cody* shorts in spring 1952, the film unit took a break and began production of the serial *Zombies of the Stratosphere*. They returned to the *Cody* TV series later in the year and finished the remaining nine episodes. A rather routine serial, *Zombies* utilizes tons of stock footage, and its main claim to fame for today's audiences is the appearance of *Star Trek*'s Leonard Nimoy as Narab, an alien henchman.

Before Yates picked the more commercial Commando Cody, the hero of *Radar Men from the Moon* was originally named Larry Martin. Effort was never wasted at Republic, however, so the name was tagged onto the hero of *Zombies*. Judd Holdren moved from his Commando Cody character right into Larry Martin without missing a beat. Aline Towne, who had played Cody's secretary Joan in both *Radar Men* and the *Cody* TV series, was also on board, but underwent a character name change to Sue Davis when Cody was dropped.

Then, the Martians attack again! Location evidently being just as important in the interstellar realty market as anywhere else, an advanced "army" consisting of two Martians (Marex and Narab) arrives on Earth to build and detonate a hydrogen bomb that will knock the planet out of its orbit and allow Mars to take its place. Marex recruits Dr. Harding, an Earth scientist with a criminal bent, to aid in his scheme, which includes getting the materials necessary to construct the bomb.

Assigned to investigate the Martian spaceship entering Earth's atmosphere, Larry Martin uses his rocket suit to fly to the landing site. He arrives in time to see the fleeing spaceship, but is unable to intercept the craft. Chapter after chapter, Martin trails the agents while they try to gather the components of the bomb that is being constructed in the water-filled shaft of an abandoned mine.

The flying scenes were all stock shots from *King of the Rocket Men*. While Martin's spaceship was recycled from *Radar Men from the Moon*, the serial's new addition was the Martians' spaceship, which sported a gun turret on top. In both serials featuring the rocketships, only the tail section was constructed full-scale to show people arriving and entering the craft.

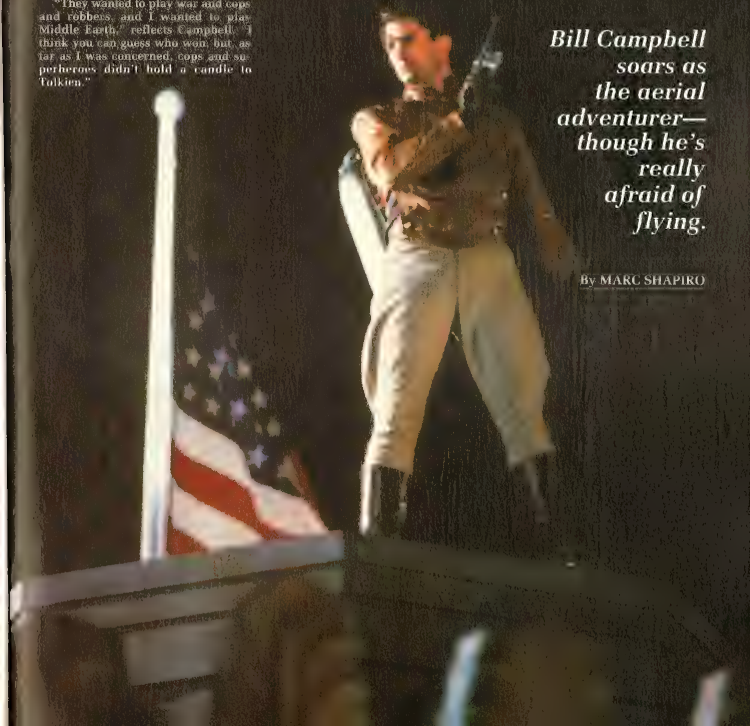
Zombies of the Stratosphere also featured Republic's unique robot, first seen in *Undersea Kingdom* and later slightly modified for *Mysterious Dr. Satan*. Feeling the financial bite of interplanetary invasions, the Martians use the robot to rob a bank in Chapter 5. Also feeling the economic pinch, Republic lifted the entire sequence from Chapter 7 of *Dr. Satan*. *Satan's Satellites*, a feature version of *Zombies*, was released in 1958.

These serials, although juvenile and dated, can be enjoyed as the simple slam-bang adventures they were meant to be. Fortunately, good copies of all three Republic serials are available on videotape from Republic Pictures Home Video. Can *The Rocketeer* fly as well as these lost planet airmen of the past? That question can be answered at your local bijou.

ROCKETEER

Bill Campbell soars as the aerial adventurer—though he's really afraid of flying.

By MARC SHAPIRO



When William O. Campbell was a youngster playing with friends on rural Virginia streets, the mode of recreation would inevitably turn to "let's pretend." At those moments, the actor currently blasting through '30s skies as the Rocketeer recalls that he usually didn't get his way.

"They wanted to play war and cops and robbers, and I wanted to play Middle Earth," reflects Campbell. "I think you can guess who won but, as far as I was concerned, cops and superheroes didn't hold a candle to Tolkien."

Campbell is reflecting on long-ago playground frustrations in his trailer on the Disney lot where *The Rocketeer*, the actor's first starring big-screen vehicle, is within striking distance of the finish line. Soothing '30s big band music swirls in lazy waves around the actor, but it appears to be doing little to decrease the obvious discomfort the admittedly "private" Campbell is suffering at the interview process. When he does talk, Campbell is soft-spoken and halting.

He concedes that a one-on-one interview is tough, but that hitting the talk show circuit in support of *The*

Art By & Copyright 1993 Dave Stevens

The Rocketeer helmet's eyepieces weren't a problem in the comics, but for Campbell, flying with them was "like running around in a fog bank."

Rocketeer is something he truly dreads.

"I'm a *disaster* on live talk shows," he admits. "I'm lost without a script or words to read. You can't be honest on those shows. You can't be *yourself*."

Campbell notes that playing the Rocketeer was easy because "Cliff isn't a difficult character to find."

Campbell claims that being himself, to the tune of a 6-foot-plus 200-pound frame and well-chiseled, youthful features, was the key to being chosen to play 1930s flyboy Cliff Secord.

"They picked me because I was already pretty much how they envisioned the Rocketeer as looking," he explains. "I was so close to this guy that I didn't feel there was much I had to do to find the character. Cliff isn't a difficult character to find anyway."

Nevertheless, Campbell made a point of becoming well-versed in *The Rocketeer* era.

"I read Dave's [Stevens] comics for background. I also read books about the history of the period and, in particular, the history of aviation of the late '30s and early '40s. And I believe all the research I did ultimately gave me a better perspective on the time in which the Rocketeer lived. The movie allowed me to capture some of the feeling of that period, but the research gave me a clear idea of what that time was like."

With that knowledge in mind, Campbell claims he walked calmly into what he considers "his big break."

"I didn't feel much pressure at first," the actor admits. "I had done a whole lot of television, which is a real trial by fire, so I felt fairly well-prepared for this role. But I'll be honest with you: the first few weeks of filming were rough on me emotionally. There I was, working with a great director and a terrific cast, and I was very nervous and feeling totally outgunned as an actor. After a while, I loosened up, relaxed and got my confidence back."

Once that returned, Campbell was able to devote his time to exploring his character and, subsequently, discover that he and Cliff Secord have a great deal in common.

"Which is why it took so little to get into the character," he explains. "Cliff can be childish and quite a bit naive about things and so can I. He's also selfish, mischievous and a little rough around the edges, which is kind of like me. I guess casting me as the Rocketeer was almost typecasting."

Almost, for while Cliff Secord doesn't think twice about blasting off into the wild blue yonder, Bill Campbell has a distinct fear of flying. That fear was put to the test shortly after filming of *The Rocketeer*'s extensive aerial sequences began in Santa Monica, CA.

"Going in, I didn't know how involved I would be in the actual flying sequences," relates Campbell. "Much to my horror, Joe [Johnston, the director] came up to me just before filming began and asked me if I would be willing to do some of the flying scenes, and particularly the ones involving the racing plane. What was I supposed to tell him? 'No, because I'm afraid to fly?' Of course I agreed."

Campbell's first aerial test came in the cockpit of a three-passenger vintage bi-plane. The plane was dressed to feature Cliff at the controls, with a real pilot hidden up front.

"I remember going out to the field that first day and getting ready to get into the plane, when I noticed the real pilot was wearing a parachute and I *didn't* have one. I asked him about that, and he said it was just for padding on his seat. Well, I looked at my seat and realized that it didn't have any padding either. But I didn't want to make any waves, so I kept my mouth shut and prayed."

Prayer was definitely in order, as the plane taxied down the runway and into the air for a series of acrobatic stunts.

"We flew all over Santa Monica at a height that really wasn't very comfortable for me," Campbell relates with a bit of understatement. "He went through all these dives and other maneuvers, and all I could do was sit there, give the right look to the camera and try not to let on that I was scared to death. If the fear doesn't come across in those scenes, then I gave the best performance of my career," he says.

Campbell's continued air battle centered on the sequences in which the Rocketeer, both in and out of the trademark helmet, makes maximum use of the jet pack.

Those flying sequences were all wire work. Fortunately, they didn't hang me from helicopters or anything like that. All the flying stunts were done at fairly safe levels.

"The jet pack and the helmet were fairly easy to handle, but they also presented some physical problems," he explains. "We had different versions of the jet pack. Those used in the action and stunt sequences were made of things like rubber and plastic and were fairly easy to handle. But the hero pack—which I wore quite a bit—weighed a lot and it was tough on my back. They never really worked out the inside of the helmet to my satisfaction. It has a couple of bolts inside, and every time I would put on the helmet, the bolts would press into my skull. The eyepieces also had a tendency to fog up, so when I was flying, it was like running around in a fog bank."

Campbell's recollections of the tougher side of *Rocketeer* life included running and jumping on the zeppelin mock-up (which led to more than one fall into an airbag) and choreographed fights executed with the stunt team's aid. But Campbell offers that his most memorable scenes in *The Rocketeer* were "the tiny scenes."

"The scenes I'm definitely going to remember are the ones where I don't have a whole lot to say. And those are the scenes, in hindsight, that are a

Preferring to stand on ground, Campbell tried "not to let on that I was scared to death about the idea of flying."

Always a gentleman, Campbell was reluctant to bother anyone, especially when they look like Jennifer Connelly.

All Rocketeer Photos: Ron Batdorf/©Copyright 1991 The Walt Disney Company

"I was pretty much sure they envisioned the Rocketeer as lookier," says Campbell.

some of the funniest. The scene where Jim in Peevy's house and encounter Lothar for the first time is very funny, and the scene at the South Seas Club, where I came up to Sinclair's table disguised as a waiter, is hilarious. This is an action-oriented, special FX-heavy movie, but I enjoyed doing those scenes where it came down to acting skills and timing to make them work."

Bill Campbell was born and raised in Virginia, where as a youth, he began a tenuous relationship with fantasy and comic books.

"I was into *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit* and just about everything by Tolkien," he remembers. "I was into comics like *Sgt. Rock* and *The Losers*, but I never followed any particular comic series for long, because I was into the artwork more than the stories."

Campbell discovered acting in high school and gave up a promising rugby career to pursue roles in high school productions. Following graduation, acting took a backseat to Campbell's renewed interest in art.

"I was attending the American Academy of Art in Chicago and was thinking of going into comic book illustration," he recalls. "I had a friend who was studying acting and I went along with him one night just to see what it was all about. It was exciting and seemed like fun in a way that commercial art wasn't. After a couple of months of sitting in, I started taking classes on my own. One interest eventually overtook the other, and I dropped out of art school."

Campbell then started training at the Ted Liss Studio for the Performing Arts. He made his professional debut in an improvisational sword and sorcery production called *Dungeon Master* and continued his education at Chicago's Second City. Campbell then came west and made an immediate impact on the small screen with appearances on *Family Ties* and *Hotel* and as recurring characters on *Dynasty* and *Crime Story*.

His thoughts return to *The Rocketeer* as he speculates on what audiences will get out of this flight.

"Certain liberties are being taken with the story," he says, "but I don't think they're going to bother anyone. Dave's stories have a certain edge to them that I don't think is entirely appropriate for a mass audience. But I feel that the movie is being quite faithful to the spirit of the original comics.

The Rocketeer may be one of the summer's biggest films. And, of course, big films often spawn sequels. The prospect of donning the jet pack and helmet in subsequent sequels doesn't scare Campbell.

"Sure, I'm prepared to play the Rocketeer again. Why not? If I'm still playing this character in five years, that would be fine with me. I feel there's a lot of potential for me as an actor in continuing to play this character. Cliff could have adventures just about anywhere. He would most likely continue to maintain his sense of impulsiveness and innocence. I also see him maturing and learning to deal with the idea of being a hero. We've only scratched the surface with this character. There's still a long way to go."

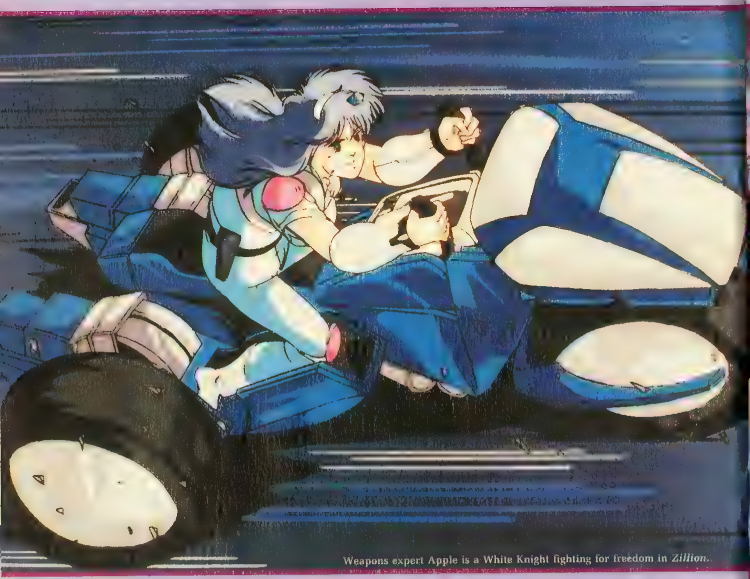
With sequels, however, comes a splash of fame, and Campbell is an actor who already seems a bit uncomfortable with the public eye.

"I guess I'm prepared for stardom," he says as he beats a nervous tattoo on his lighter. "I just don't know what I have to do to prepare. If I'm going to be a star, that's fine with me. I don't have any fears about what stardom might do to me. I don't think stardom is something that's going to drive me crazy. But I may be wrong. I guess we'll just have to wait and see."

Campbell pauses as the mellow tones of "In the Mood" fill the trailer and put him in a '30s state of mind for that afternoon's shooting.

"If I could get on one of those TV talk shows and get the real side of my personality across," Bill Campbell says, "people would see somebody who's not quite sure of himself, somebody who is fairly open-minded and has insecure moments, but is rushing headlong in trying to get over them. Somebody like the Rocketeer."

Researching Dave Stevens' comic gave Campbell "a better perspective on the time in which the Rocketeer lived."



Weapons expert Apple is a White Knight fighting for freedom in *Zillion*.

VIDEO COMICS

By BOB MILLER

Graphic adventures are on the move to monthly, thanks to home video.

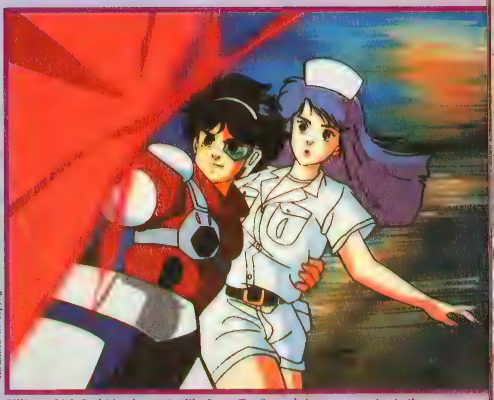
Not all comic books are printed on paper. Now they're available on home videocassettes and released on a monthly basis at comics specialty shops. Video Comics is a new program by Streamline Pictures, the distribution company that imported the Japanese-animated features *Akira*, *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, *Lensman* and *Robot Carnival*.

"*Zillion* is going to be the first video comics mini-series done," says Carl Macek, who produced *Robotech* for Harmony Gold in the mid-1980s and later co-founded Streamline Pictures (CS#12). "It's our attempt at [introducing] OVA [Original Video Animation]–style animation to the specialty retail market, dubbed into English instead of being subtitled."

Originally, the series aired in Japan in 1987 as *Red Photon Zillion*, based on a toy line by Sega, the electronics company. The 31-episode TV saga was produced by Tatsunoko Studios and animated by a staff initially assembled for the later-cancelled project *Robotech II: The Sentinels*.

All Zillion Art Copyright 1991 Takatoku&Streamline Pictures

The Noza attack the planet Maris, and only the White Knights and Zillion can stop them.



***Zillion*, which Carl Macek says is "like Lazer Tag," may bring new meaning to the words "Game Over" for the Noza race.**

Macek describes the concept as being "like Lazer Tag, in which a kid got a gun and [target] vest and would run around the backyard firing at another costumed child. Unfortunately, Lazer Tag had many returns; it was a high-priced ticket item and never really caught on. The problems that Lazer Tag had were solved by this *Zillion* toy, but marketing strategy in the U.S.—being what it is—decided that any toy similar to Lazer Tag wouldn't meet the market.

"Subsequently, Sega released two video game cartridges for their master system with the characters that appear in the cartoon. Hopefully, when we do the English version of [*Zillion*], we'll introduce American audiences to this game and its characters."

The story occurs on the distant planet Maris, which is settled by human colonists in the 23rd century. A race of aliens called the Noza attack the planet, and a group of freedom fighters (code-named the White Knights) try to destroy the invaders. The only weapon that's effective against the Noza is a mysterious alien gun called Zillion.

Among the White Knights are: J.J. (voiced by Doug Stone), a reckless teenager who often needs rescuing by his friends; Champ (Kerigan Mahan), a soldier and ladies' man; and Apple (Barbara Goodson), a resourceful weapons expert. Their chief adversary is Ryxx (pronounced "Ricks"), whose interest in destroying the White Knights becomes an obsession.

All Zillion Art Courtesy Streamline Pictures

Macek hopes to release all 31 segments of *Zillion* and make it "the first video comics mini-series."

Each cassette retails for $14.95, released exclusively to the specialty retail market (not traditional home video stores) and by mail order. Episodes will be released one per month. After the first five entries, if the program is successful, the series will continue for the duration of its 31 segments (plus "Burning Night," the *Zillion* OVA released in Japan in June 1988).

Because the series will be released on video, Macek points out, "it will avoid having any kind of restrictions as to the kind of language that we use. It's going to be very faithful to the Japanese, but done in a similar fashion to what people liked best about *Robotech*—snappy dialogue and well-acted character voices. It will be, hopefully, the *Robotech* for a new generation. That's the goal; we're trying to repeat the impact that *Robotech* had."

Streamline's other videos include the movie *Akira* ($29.95) and *Akira: Production Report* ($24.95). Future video releases will include the American TV classics *Clutch Cargo*, *Space Angel* and *Colonel Bleep*.

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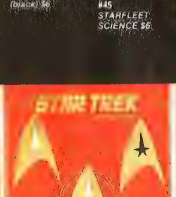

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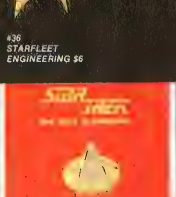

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Tom Lyle sets the Impact Universe ablaze with the Comet.

By PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL

The Comet ™ & copyright 1991 Archie Publications Inc. All Comet Art: Tom Lyle

This Comet could use his Archie predecessor's "dissolvo ray" right about now.

When I think about superheroes, the powers are secondary. Their personality, what they do, what they are, their personal growth is more important to me," says Tom Lyle, plotter and penciller on *The Comet*, part of DC's new Impact line of comics. "I'm not saying *The Comet* is autobiographical, but I will say I've pulled things from my life, from friends' lives, extrapolated on them, made them more dramatic and extreme."

Like all the other Impact titles—*Legend of the Shield*, *The Fly*, *Jaguar* and *The Web*—the hero of *The Comet* is loosely based on a character originally published by Archie (then MLJ) Comics in the 1940s and revived briefly first in the '60s and again in the '80s. DC licensed rights to the characters a few years ago.

This new Comet will have little in common with his predecessor, who was originally a flying vigilante with the power to disintegrate anything, including felons, and later became something of a SF-type super-scientist in a rainbow helmet. "Because of his name, I felt compelled to use things that made sense with it," Lyle explains. "He can fly, which seems pretty standard for this kind of character. I *did* look at some of the original Comet, who had a dissolvo ray, and rejected that. My Comet can emit heat, light and a kind of laser beam and stun beam—though I'm trying to avoid using corny phrases like that. He has no invulnerability or anything like that, but he will discover he has enhanced speed. That will help him avoid some things, but overall, if he gets nailed, he's *nailed*."

The genesis of the new Comet—and all the Impact characters—was at a special meeting of DC editors and creators last year, according to Lyle. "DC had a retreat with a bunch of the people involved with this project to discuss our goals," he recalls. "We had a general brainstorming session and actually created a back history of our Impact Universe, using some of the older characters' names and stuff—but frankly, we started completely from scratch with all the characters, in terms of stories and backgrounds."

Lyle came to fan attention as the original penciller on DC's *Starman*. He says his editor, Brian Augustyn, was the first to inquire if he might be interested in this new venture.

"Brian told me they had a new thing starting without telling me a whole heck of a lot," Lyle laughs. "He eventually mentioned who the characters were and it sounded interesting. Originally, I campaigned for the Shield, but that became one of Mike Gold's characters; I wanted to stay with Brian because we've worked out a really good relationship. So, the Comet was my choice of characters."

Like fellow Impact creator Grant

(*Legend of the Shield*) Miehm (see CS SPECTACULAR #4), Lyle is taking a halfway step between just drawing and becoming a writer/artist. He will plot The Comet, while Mark Waid provides the dialogue.

"Part of the reason I was offered the plotting was that I had been telling Brian that I was very interested in writing," Lyle notes. "Toward the end of my run on *Starman*, I had some input on the plotting and Brian was impressed with my ideas. So, the folks at DC were willing to take a chance with someone like me, who's unknown."

Why didn't Lyle push for the opportunity to write the dialogue as well? "You're making a wrong assumption—I *did* push to do the dialogue too," he insists. "The editors were confident in my *plotting* abilities, but because it's a new line, they wanted the strongest material they could get. I'm doing rough dialogue for the book, which Mark Waid is also using to a certain extent, but I've also told him not to feel hamstrung by it. I'm leading up to doing the dialogue eventually."

So, if super-powers are secondary to personality and background, as Lyle suggests, who *is* the Comet, anyway?

"Rob Connors is the Comet," Lyle answers. "He's a 20-year-old kid, and I've tried to work in some of the things I thought I was going through at that age; it may be a little vicarious therapy. He has a tough situation at the beginning: His parents are missing. That's what I've built much of the early tension on—where are they, what's happened to them and how is he going to find them?"

Lyle says the way the Impact Universe was put together—with forethought and an eye to creating a coherent whole all at once—made a big difference in devising the people, places and things surrounding his hero.

"One of the neat things about all of the Impact books is that we created bibles for them," he notes. "I've plotted the series' whole first year and created all of the background characters, so there's a pretty deep well to draw on. Rob has a girl friend, Victoria, who's

***The Comet*'s "freedom" from DC continuity has made an Impact with Lyle.**

Lyle considers the Comet's powers secondary. "His personal growth is more important to me."

Lyle better warn this non-invulnerable Comet to watch out, because "if he gets nailed, he's *nailed*."

older than he, and will be a catalyst for stories. A lot of the first two issues revolve around her, because the first major villain is Applejack, a murderer stalking the Comet's hometown, Evergreen, Washington—and Rob's girl is next on his list. Applejack is a Jack the Ripper-type character. By the way, Victoria knows that Rob is the Comet and, in fact, helped create the costume and come up with the name."

Rob will also have a couple of male friends—and some back-up from law enforcement as well. "I wanted to make sure he had a good group of people to talk to," Lyle comments. "There are a couple of police detectives and a character who *appears* to be an FBI agent who comes to town to investigate the Comet. In our history, there haven't been any superheroes since right before John F. Kennedy's assassination. They all disappeared. Now there's a whole bunch of new ones and the authorities are concerned about it.

"I have a part in introducing a character that DC has not revealed as yet, also adapted from the Archie line," Lyle continues. "I will say it's *not* the Hangman—I have dibs on the Hangman and I'm going to use him in *The Comet*. In issue #11, there's a crossover with the Fly. Our idea with crossovers is not to have them be too frequent, to make them an event, to make them important. They don't just happen to pump up sales."

It seems as if all the major publishers have expansion in the works this year; that will mean lots of new titles—some with *very* established stars—on the stands. Lyle says that DC thought about that and wants to make sure the Impact line gets noticed.

"Attracting readers to a new title is something we addressed at that retreat," he points out. "There *is* a lot of material out there. DC plans to run a major campaign to attract readers who aren't already interested in comics to this line. That was the whole point of making them accessible books. We'll have complex storylines, but we're going to try not to have storylines that go on for years and years, where if you pick it up in the middle, you're dead meat.

"Anyway, my job is to do the best darn entertainment story I can and hope that DC does the right marketing things to draw in the readers."

In this continuity-conscious age in comics, is Lyle concerned that fans will reject a series that's outside DC's established world? Does he feel it limits his ability to create interesting plots? Not at all.

"Not being a part of the mainstream DC Universe is a freedom, so I don't have to mess with what I consider an imposing continuity," Tom Lyle admits. "I look at the DC continuity and think, 'Wow! I don't know what's what!' Starting from scratch with this universe gives me power to develop stories. I don't have to worry about what has gone before. I like that."

THE WONDER MAN YEARS

The once-dead superhero really wants to be an immortal of the silver screen.

By T.L. JOHNS

In the Marvel Universe, "there's always room for another big, strong guy who gets into fights," says Jones.

"He's a good, basic, simple hero," Jones says, "in terms of power."

All Wonder Man Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1991 Marvel Entertainment Group

He has been around forever, yet we hardly even know him. Questions follow wherever he turns up: Is he dead? Alive? Human? He's a superhero who has had powers and fame thrust upon him, yet he longs for the simple life of a movie star.

He's Wonder Man, a character who has been floating around the Marvel Universe for decades, yet who's just *now* getting a chance to star in his own monthly series. Charged with his fate are editor Fabian Nicieza (see page 9), writer Gerard (*The Shadow Strikes!*) Jones and artist Jeff (*Stalker*) Johnson.

Although Wonder Man, alias Simon Williams, made his first appearance with *The Avengers* about 27 years ago, little has been written about him. He appeared in *Marvel Spotlight*, starred in a one-shot in the mid-1980s and fronted several *West Coast Avengers* stories. Yet, the confusing tale of his life and the characters closely associated with him (the Vision and Grim Reaper) has never been probed before.

"He's a character who has changed so much that people had a hard time getting a hold on him," says Jones, who's no stranger to taking on less prominent characters. His short-lived *El Diablo* and treatments of pulp classic The Shadow and pop-comic icon Green Lantern have brought some new dimensions to older heroes (all of which he discussed in CS #14).

Wonder Man began his Marvel career as a villain, but "one of those Marvel-type noble villains," observes Jones. "He was a pure soul, but he was misunderstood and had been tricked into serving the bad guys. He ended up sacrificing his life, apparently, to save the good guys."

However, Wonder Man soon came back, not as Simon Williams, however, but as a being living off of an internal and mysterious source of energy, and this time, he was determined to side with the good guys. He joined the Avengers and eventually moved out with several other heroes to form the West Coast Avengers.

"I'm just now learning a lot [about his life] as I go," mentions Jones. "I wasn't real clear on it when the project was first suggested to me, but I've done some homework. Wonder Man was dead for a long time, then he came back to life. Now, he's human on the outside, but he has this energy stuff on the inside, so he's not human all the way through. He doesn't have to eat or sleep, but he enjoys doing both, especially eating. He has all sorts of baggage left over from earlier incarnations that we're going to peel off to try to get at his essence.

"I was vague on the character when Fabian talked to me about it. As I got into the character, I discovered he was fun. I was intrigued with a superhero who wanted to be something other than a superhero, yet continued to have superhero stuff thrown at him."

Wonder Man even reminded Jones a bit of Lester Girls, the protagonist of *The Trouble with Girls*, the cultish comedy series Jones started with co-writer Will Jacobs.

"They both just keep getting the fame and glory thrown at them. I won't write the character quite the same way, but it's certainly the same skin. Which seems to be a theme that I like, that sort of unwanted success theme. Once I saw Simon's non-superhero ambitions, I found a dimension I could play with. The thing about a full-time superhero is that he can get dull after a while. [Those characters] really don't have a life other than resting between fights and doing things with their girl friends. It's nice to have one who has a *separate* set of interests."

While Jones is just learning about Wonder Man, to artist Jeff Johnson, he's an old pal. "Wonder Man has been one of my favorite characters for a long time," the 22-year-old Californian says. "In fact, I did a bunch of submissions [to Marvel] with him as the lead. He has always been this wounded guy, not your typical good-guy, superhero Boy Scout. He didn't even want to *be* a superhero, but he can't ignore the fact that he has these special powers. There's this special innate quality about him that makes people like him."

Jones agrees. While researching the hero, he discovered that when *Avengers* fans write in, nominating characters without series to get their own titles, Wonder Man consistently comes out first.

"He's the rare combination of a character who has a long list of credentials in the Marvel Universe, but doesn't have much absolutely fixed about him. There's a lot of room to mess around, as opposed to Green Lantern, where there's *so* much established that I can't move without tripping over something already done.

Colors: Dana Moreshead

Jeff Johnson expects *Wonder Man* to offer many fight scenes for the artist to draw.

"Wonder Man has a strong following. He's a good, basic, simple hero, in terms of power. There's always room for another big, strong guy who gets into fights. And he's interesting looking. He has those red eyes, and the odd edge that I don't think anybody has really worked over."

His clothing, however, will be among some of the changes Jones and Johnson are making in *Wonder Man*. His new costume will be brought into the '90s by way of a hipper style, the loss of wristbands to make way for white leather gloves and even a more youthful appearance. He'll keep the red eyes, but they'll be downplayed and become less of a joke, especially in Wonder Man's personal life and his journey to become a star of the silver screen.

A superhero as a movie star? Well Wonder Man has been trying to get into acting for some time. Now, he has finally made it into Hollywood and the whole LA scene, which is the main reason Jones took on the assignment.

"The LA stuff was a big appeal to me," the writer explains. "Fabian said he wanted someone who could do a lot with both Los Angeles as a city and Hollywood as a business, and I immediately perked up because that's fun to play with."

Jones has personal experience in both areas. Not only has he lived close to the LA scene for most of his life, but when *The Trouble with Girls* was optioned by 20th Century Fox over a year ago, he learned the highs and lows of being in "The Biz."

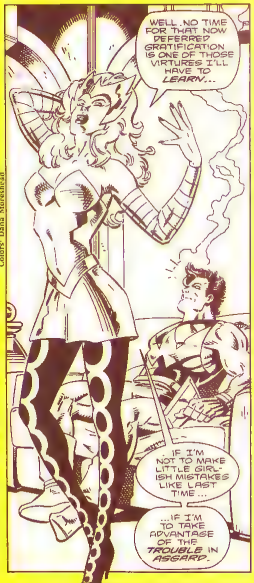
"Wonder Man is trying to become an actor and learning to navigate the movie industry labyrinth. I'll try not to get too 'in-jokey' with it, but I do want to add some details for authenticity. It's certainly a ridiculous, fascinating, funny, stupid place. I also want to use the city of LA as a character, as opposed to just Hollywood as an industry. I want to get in all of the ghettoization, the rich and poor, the ethnic stuff, the tension and trendiness.

"I want to do East LA and South LA, the places where the gangs are and the places where the immigrants pour in, and the fringe places where the psychos and the alcoholics end up. It's going to be a blast."

While Wonder Man won't find all of this setting stifling, it will give him something to think about, he says.

"He's kind of naïve. He occasionally seems a little overwhelmed by the world around him. He never really quite fits into the LA thing. But he's amused by it."

The Enchantress visits Wonder Man for what the writer calls "a basic mind-control story."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...IF I'M NOT TO MAKE LITTLE GIRL-SIZE MISTAKES LIKE LAST TIME...
...IF I'M TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE TROUBLE IN ASGARD.

Cover: Dana Moreshead

All Images Marvel Comics unless otherwise noted.

Writer Gerard Jones promises that, like Lester, Wonder Man will have trouble with girls.

Fans also will be getting glimpses into other parts of Simon Williams' psyche.

"Since he has been dead and came back, he has this odd obsession with both mortality and immortality," Jones remarks. "In a sense, he's immortal because he lives on this energy, but he has no idea if he's going to live forever or disappear. And having been essentially dead once, he has a fear, or not so much a fear as an awareness, of death's reality, and death is very concrete to him. So, he's fascinated with the immortality of celluloid and being immortal on screen. He's hurrying to create an image of himself.

"He wants to be remembered as an actor of substance: because he has been through all of these transformations, Simon has a shaky sense of his own identity. So, in effect, he wants to take on identities on screen. He wants to be a particular kind of person in the cinematic way."

Much to Simon's chagrin, Hollywood sees Wonder Man in two ways, according to Jones. First, he's great in those action movies because he's so strong and invulnerable. This distresses him, as Simon is looking for films of quality. Second, all of the bad guys in Hollywood can't imagine a superhero who would rather be just an actor and think he has been planted there to keep a watch over them.

"And early on, it turns out that there's this criminal group trying to take over a couple of studios. That's one way we'll be creating a running opponent for him," offers the writer.

Readers will be seeing both old and new characters "on the set" of *Wonder Man*. For example, Goliath, the Enchantress, the Abominatrix and the entire West Coast Avengers will co-star in the first few issues.

"It's pretty much a slugfest for most of the first issue," says Johnson. The artist, who says his major goal at the moment is to become a regular penciller on one of Marvel's *Spider-Man* titles, as well as "do the best job I can on *Wonder Man*," says he likes to include "a lot of fight scenes" in his work.

"They're so much easier to draw than backgrounds. Actually, once you do pull it off, doing a real serious moody scene is really satisfying. But the process is so strenuous. It's so hard to do a deep moment. I wouldn't do *Doom Patrol* well. I like fight scenes; they're fun."

"The Enchantress will pit Wonder Man against all of the West Coast Avengers," Jones notes. "It's your basic mind-control story. In the third issue, he encounters the Abominatrix in a funny story that plays off of the worship of beauty in LA and her attacks on the cult of beauty. So, she's tearing up gymnasiums and tanning salons, volleyball games on the beach, all those classic 'beautiful people' activities. Then, there's a studio assassin and some hi-tech bad guys."

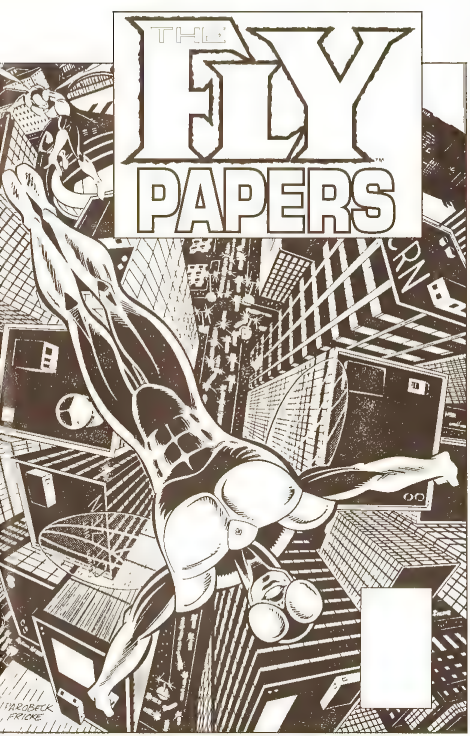
But where would a good-looking superhero be without a date? Jones says Wonder Man will find himself in a strange triangle with two very different women.

"The Scarlet Witch turns up in the second issue very briefly, but his romance with her is on hold for now. Instead, we have a duo of women he becomes involved with. One is an exploitative, vapid-seeming—but actually very sharp—young actress named Ginger Beech who is obviously attracted to him, but also seems more interested in him as a potential co-star than an individual. She's always trying to talk him into doing big, splashy action movies and using her as the damsel in distress. As it turns out, Ginger's a danger junkie and when she hangs out with him, she keeps getting into life-threatening situations.

"The other is Alex Flores. She's cynical, a wise-ass, mentally aggressive, bohemian, punky-edged and also very commercially-minded, the classic LA combination. At first, Alex is really put off by Simon because she doesn't like the big, dumb, beefcake type, which she assumes Simon to be. Then, she begins to find out he's really quite smart and sensitive and she can't quite believe it. I'm going to have a lot of hijinks and conflicts, hostility and humor with those two."

And to make matters worse, Simon's agent assigns him a "teenage sidekick" named Spider, who Jones says is more of a menace than a help.

Although most of Jones' mainstream work has been with DC Comics, he *(continued on page 66)*



Len Strazewski gives wings to another young insect hero.

By PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL

The thing that attracted me to the Fly was the idea of a teenager becoming an adult superhero. It has been done before—it's part of the Captain Marvel mythos, after all," explains Len Strazewski, writer of *The Fly*, the latest series in DC's new Impact line, which revives the heroes from the adventurous past of Archie Comics.

"I perceived the original stories as being about growing up, about a teenager who's given a shot at living out his fantasies. That's a theme I've always been intrigued by. I think it's one of the reasons young readers still turn to comics: It's a way of fantasizing, of living out their fantasies and shaping their sense of heroism, their value system."

The original Fly, essentially created by Joe Simon, Jack Kirby and writer Jack Oleck (who scripted the initial Silver Spider incarnation) in the late '50s, was Tommy Troy, a small boy given a special ring that transformed him into the adult Fly. In time, Tommy became adult attorney Thomas Troy and the Fly, Fly-Man. The character was last seen in the days of Archie's Red Circle (later Archie Adventure) line in the early 1980s.

Strazewski has returned to the original conception—a boy who becomes an adult with super-powers. "I wanted to do a comic about that. So, I kept what was viable from the earlier comic—the notion of a teenager who's given the opportunity to be an adult hero," he notes. "As a little homage to the original [series], I kept the last name of Troy—Jason Troy. Since the character *is* the Fly, he's still a guy with wings and goggle eyes. But the design is completely different, and the powers are different to some extent. The stories and the way the character interrelates with others is very '90s."

DC hopes the Impact line will be especially attractive to readers who want to get in on the ground floor of a new comics universe. With *The Fly*, Strazewski has built in something of a lesson for those readers as well.

"One of the thematic elements—a message, if you will—to the Impact readers is that we create our own heroes," he says. "Young people, in particular, have the opportunity and the adventure of creating themselves: developing their own values, their own ways of living and their own heroic ways of acting. In the first issue of *The Fly*, Jason Troy is given a school assignment: 'Create a hero for the '90s. You say you don't believe much in heroes? Take a crack at making a hero *you* can believe in.' What he comes up with is a superhero derived a little from his interest in video games, a little from the way he perceives the heroic mythos he learns in class, and something he thinks is funky and fun. This is really a teenager's creation of a hero. He is given the opportunity to *be* the hero he creates.

"This is what teenagers do with their lives if they do it well," the scribe continues. "Jason Troy gets to be his own superhero—not have it thrust upon him, not have it happen by accident, but through his own in-

According to Strazewski, heroes come from humble origins. "There's nothing more humble than a fly!"

All Fly Art: Mike Parobeck/Paul Fricke/Courtesy DC Comics Inc.

telligence, his own desire, his own feeling for what heroism is."

But a *fly*? Why would any kid choose to be a fly? Strazewski says it involves mythic heroism.

"In the story's context, it makes sense," he reports. "When Jason Troy is in class in the first issue, he hears about the heroic mythos. If you look at cultural heroes throughout history, you'll discover that they often come from humble origins. We talk about barbarian heroes—Arthur, who's a peasant boy, drawing Excalibur from the stone. They all have humble origins. There's nothing more humble than a fly! That fits in perfectly. So, the idea of a fly who becomes a human hero, just like a humble boy who's transformed into a superhero, works perfectly. I think that's right in the middle of the traditional heroic mythos. If you can turn a fly into a hero, you can do *anything*."

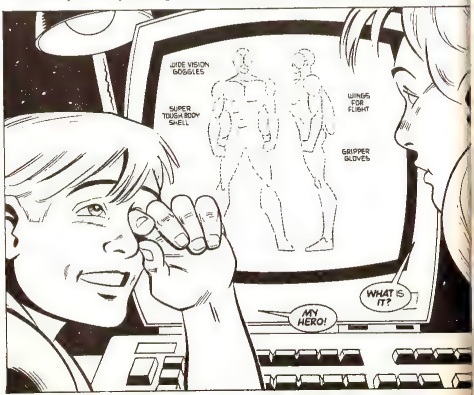
That's why, Strazewski explains, keeping the name "the Fly"—even if it lacks a certain pizazz—is important. "I think it's also worthwhile to pay some homage to something I and others remember fondly," he adds. "That gave me some inspiration in putting this whole thing together."

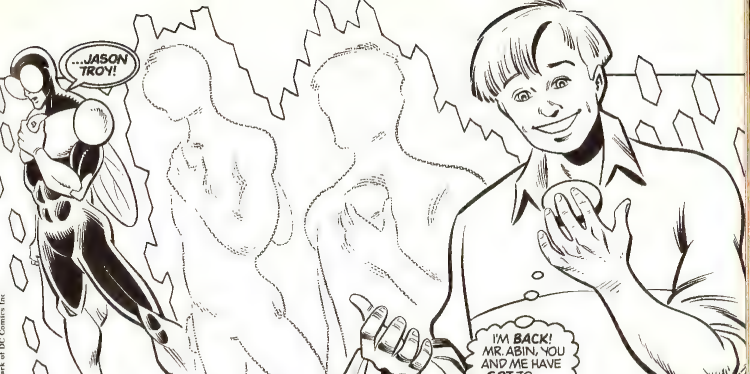
That makes it sound as though *The Fly* was more than just another assignment for Strazewski, which it was. "I was picked to do the Fly and I picked it to do. When I was asked to be a part of the original brainstorming for the Impact line, I was very interested in the character, because I had fond memories of the old Archie Adventure-line *Fly*," he explains. "I didn't think just doing that character over again was appropriate for our times, though. But when we started talking about this, I put in my bid and was pleased to be awarded that character."

The Impact line was indeed a brainstormed, almost think-tanked idea—not surprising when a publisher is licensing another company's characters and launching a whole new set of titles in a very short time. But that doesn't mean that the ideas in *The Fly* solely came out of that skull session.

"The specific theme is mine," the writer states. "The notion that we're appealing to younger readers—teenagers on the make, learning about life, creating themselves—is something we talked about as part of Impact's origin. No one is doing comics for those readers, at least not to our satisfaction. All of us 'boy buddies,' as we've come to call ourselves, have gone into the project knowing we would be doing something to appeal to *younger* readers. Each of us is taking his own slant on it. I've got the typical suburban teenager situation; Bill Loebs is looking at it from the view of a foreigner thrust into the American culture in *Jaguar*; Tom Lyle is taking another slant [on the Comet, see page 41]; Grant Miehm, with the Shield [see CS SPECTACULAR #4], is dealing with a young person whose personal values are in conflict with some of the values

***The Fly* "is really a teenager's creation of a hero," says Len Strazewski.**





Jason Troy becomes the Fly as a result of "his own feeling for what heroism is," notes the writer.

of the previous generation. We're all looking at problems and situations of younger people versus our culture, versus the older generation."

Strazewski's artistic co-creators on *The Fly* are Mike Parobeck (pencils) and Paul Fricke (inks). "Mike lives about a mile-and-a-half from me, so we get together face-to-face a lot," Strazewski notes. "Mike is very involved—he's the point man on the designs of these characters—and his designs are inspirational. In many cases, he creates a villain and I say, 'Wow! Who is this? What does he do?', and Mike answers, 'I don't know. I just created his look.' 'Whoa—then, we have something to work with!' We meet frequently to talk plots and he shows me pages. I take the point in the plots, but so much comes out of conversation that it's impossible to show where one level of inspiration ends and the next begins. We decided to keep the distinctions of writer and artist almost artificially, because so much depends on collaboration. That works as well as any other 'official' breakdown of duties—we know who does what.

"We're all gonna argue about this eventually," Strazewski laughs. "Thirty years from now in the comics trades, we're gonna say, 'I created that. All he did was follow what I said.' That's part of being in comics, creating these disagreements for 30 years in the future."

One of Parobeck's important functions is character design. Strazewski is *very* enthusiastic when describing the villains drawn by Parobeck that the writer has fleshed out.

"Mike and I have worked out what I think are some of the wackiest villains to be involved in the Impact line," he says proudly. "While the book is serious, some of the villains are a lot of fun and, at the same time, quite creepy. Much of the credit for their creation goes to Mike, who has a knack for *creepy* villains.

"There's a criminal enforcer named Chromium, a very tough guy in chrome-like life-support armor. We don't really know what his problem is," Strazewski says. "Imagine a guy in very shiny, metallic body armor—who insists on wearing $500 suits, as though that would cover up the strangeness of his metallic body. You shoot him with a machine gun and the bullets bounce off, but they ruin his suit—and that *hacks* him off.

"There's a criminal mastermind in the city of Crown's Point, where Jason and the Fly live, called Arachnis—yes, we *had* to do a little spider-and-fly motif," he admits. "Arachnis is also very creepy and very mechanical. He either has no legs or they have atrophied, because he has replaced them with mechanized spider-like legs that could crush the life out of somebody."

But not all of the Fly's adversaries will be male. What's life without a little female complication? "There's a female villain coming up who could be fun—Domino. She's a games player, whose crimes revolve around games and build like a domino game: The crimes keep getting bigger and bigger until they all come together.

"We're trying to be fun, trying to keep the story centered in Crown's Point, though Jason will be doing some traveling. The goal is for Jason to deal with his possibilities, to grow up as a superhero."

In time, Strazewski notes, Jason will learn he isn't the only superpowered character in the world. The Impact Universe, once filled with superheroes, has had a dry spell for 25 years or so. The Fly is merely one of several characters who's about to revive the tradition of some worthy predecessors.

"All the characters will make appearances in each other's books. We've plotted out some of those stories. Mostly, they'll appear a little later in the first year of each title," the author comments. "We need to get these guys set up and on their own before we do an extensive series of crossovers. The two characters who don't fit into that rule are the Web [not a single character but a government agency], which will move in and out of all the titles, and the person we refer to as the 'mystery character,' [though his identity has been inadvertently revealed in some DC marketing

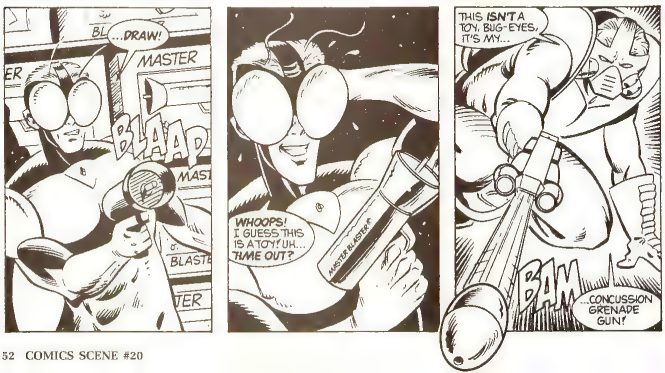
Chromium and Arachnis "are some of the wackiest villains to be involved in the Impact line," says Strazewski.

material), who will appear three or four months into the line. He'll make cameo appearances in several of the books, and major appearances in *Web* #3 and *Fly* #4."

So, will these heroes ever formalize their budding friendships? Is there a team in the offing? "I think the prospects for a team book are very good," Strazewski replies. "There's none on the schedule yet and no writer has been assigned to create a team book, but in the past continuity, there was a group called the American Crusaders, who were active in the '50s and '60s. The prospect of a contemporary group modeled on the one in the back story is very good. It all depends on sales and demand."

Sales and demand, two items which every comic-book hero must fear as much as the latest super-villain. Given the long hiatus the Fly and other Impact characters have had, many would say there is no marquee value, no name recognition in them. However, Len Strazewski thinks there *is* value in using these names. "Marketing? I don't know—maybe the DC people feel there's marketing value to the name. Creatively, I think it works dramatically and ties into comics continuity. Many people my age remember the original *Fly*, and I think continuity with that is fine." CS

Jason better realize Strazewski's goal to have him "grow up as a superhero" *fast*.



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VIKING GLORY

Sword slashing, the Viking Prince sails back into a fjord near you.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

One of the greatest heroes of 1950s comics is being brought into the 1990s, continuing his adventures in 900 A.D. Bob Kanigher and Joe Kubert's legendary Viking Prince returns in *Viking Glory*, a painted art, deluxe hardcover DC graphic novel by Lee Marrs and Bo Hampton.

Marrs, who's scripting the return of one of comics' first sword-and-sorcery heroes, jokingly calls the project "a mission from the goddess. She just appeared to me floating over the backyard," Marrs laughs, explaining that she has been a longtime fan of the Viking Prince, who originally appeared in *Brave & the Bold*, since she was a little girl.

"He was one of my favorites," says Marrs. "I was a fan of Joe Kubert's, although I didn't really know enough about comics to know his name.

"I really enjoyed those Viking Prince stories a lot. In Alabama, it was one of the few opportunities to see an almost-naked good-looking guy leaping around," she laughs, but there were also more practical reasons for her choice of subject matter.

"Frankly, there were various characters that DC hadn't used all that often," Marrs admits. "They bring them out of the closet every now and again, and toss them around to see if anybody's interested. I leapt at the chance to do a Viking Prince project in order to fulfill a childhood fantasy!"

From talking to people at conventions over the years, Marrs has uncovered several reasons why the Viking Prince appeals to readers.

"Much of it is the fantasy-romantic adventure. There aren't many types of adventure stories—they're usually Westerns or war adventure. There's also a lot of appeal in the Viking culture *per se*, and of course, with the old Viking Prince stories, you could throw in dragons, gremlins and other fantasy figures. At least, I *suppose* they were fantasy figures! You can never tell—every time *National Geographic* comes out, there's some new revelation—'Yes, there *were* flying dinosaurs when cavemen lived!' But, if we assume they're fantasy figures, it's a way of getting in, if not science fiction, then a sense of fantasy that people enjoy in their adventure stories."

According to Hampton, what originally appealed to him was the Kanigher-Kubert character himself, although Marrs' story had some additional attractions. "One thing I liked about what Lee was doing with it, though, was that the story was a little more in keeping with the Viking lifestyle—unlike what Kanigher and Kubert did. I told my friend John Hitchcock that Lee was going to keep it more realistic, at least until the end. He said, 'What, you mean the Viking Prince *isn't* going to be striding through the Sahara?' "Hampton laughs.

"Kanigher and Kubert took so much license with it in a way, it would be fun to do that, too—go wild with it and take him all over the world. Lee didn't even take him to Europe; it was all set around the fjords and the villages around Hedeby, which was a real trading center. Kubert's Viking Prince was always going off to ice kingdoms and fantasy places, saving fairy princesses. The only real

Lee Marrs enjoyed the old Viking Prince stories. "It was one of the few opportunities to see an almost-naked, good-looking guy leaping around."

during a WWII story! They let me do what I wanted with the character, and I was quite interested in doing a coming-of-age story, looking at the Viking Prince as being a happy-go-lucky type who didn't usually have an intellectual thought in his head and could pretty much do as he pleased. He's like the star quarterbacks in high school who got all the girls and admiration from everybody. What would happen when this person got a little older and came into circumstances that weren't always solved by pulling out a sword?

"Jon is sent off to marry into a royal family, and so he has adversaries within the kingdom where he has gone to eventually become the king, after the current king dies. Not only does he have adversaries within the kingdom, he's also sent off on an actual quest, where he ends up having to fight a dragon. He'll face adversaries both large and small!"

Although it is a coming-of-age story, Marrs says the Viking Prince won't come of age *too quickly*. "He won't become the Viking King in this story, but if there are other stories down the line, he's certainly going to be up for it."

All Art: Courtesy Bo Hampton
All Viking Prince Painted Art, Bo Hampton

fantasy element in this story," Hampton points out thoughtfully, "arrives in the last 20 pages, and that's the dragon.

"That was one thing that appealed to me about the Viking Prince, but mainly, it was the visuals of the Viking world—it's so organic. There's so much wood and fur, and everything comes from the earth and is very natural. I don't have to draw a bunch of *buildings*," says Hampton.

This new adventure involves the coming of age of Jon, the Viking Prince. "It was clear from the beginning that it wasn't a matter of my fitting this into any Viking Prince [continuity] over the years since here's somebody who at one point showed up

For Jon to achieve his *Viking Glory*, "he'll face adversaries both large and small," says Marrs.

Marrs promises readers will really care "whether the dragon turns the Vikings into bloody pulp!"

The original stories featured several supporting characters, but Marrs says today's readers don't need to be at all familiar with the old tales to appreciate this graphic novel.

"You wouldn't need to have ever read *any* stories about the Viking Prince. This isn't one of those stories where there's an insert panel saying, 'This makes reference to the first time so-and-so—see issue #75!'" she says. "It's self-contained, although there are inklings of what could happen in the future. Still, for fans who've read the Kubert stories, it will have resonances."

Marrs admits that Kanigher and Kubert certainly influenced her graphic novel. "Many of the fellows who worked in the '40s and '50s were heavily influenced by movies. There was a Douglas Fairbanks–movie feel to many of those Viking Prince stories, and that tone is what I tried to put into this, which isn't my usual tone," she observes. "A little more slapstick and hearty Viking humor—I'm more for puns and such, but there's a little more hamhock–tossing in this than I would normally do!"

Ms. Viking Prince Characters & Art Trademark & Copyright 1993 DC Comics Inc.

Marrs wasn't always able to collaborate with artist Bo Hampton as closely as she would like, simply because of the distances involved.

"It was much more distant than any other collaboration I've had—literally, because Bo's in the Carolinas and I'm in California. The budget for the project wasn't such that we could be flying back and forth and having wonderful confabs over cappuccino," she laughs. "In effect, I suppose I did a much more complete script than I have on other projects, but we talked quite a bit on the phone, particularly when he

Artist Bo Hampton thinks his Joe Kubert influences show best "when the Viking Prince is dressed in full regalia."

"A little more slapstick and hearty Viking humor" is the tone Marrs hopes *Viking Glory* will offer.

was just starting, and we had some common references, such as movies we had seen. There was quite a bit of material that went back and forth, and in a way, we were naturally attuned as to what the story would be like."

Hampton's art draws high praise from Marrs.

"When I draw my own work—and one of the things I most admire in other peoples' work, which isn't very common in comics at all—is when a variety of facial and body expressions are used to convey what's happening in a scene. Too often, even some of the really good classic comic book artists who are quite famous and well-known had maybe three facial expressions and four body positions, and they would change the camera angle on it. Bo isn't like that at all. He has a tremendous range of expression and tone, and I was very impressed with how he captured the subtlety of things that were set up to happen, and really punched up the passion in some of the sequences. People reading it will really care whether these two lovers manage to get together, or whether this villain pulls off his rotten scheme, or whether the dragon turns the Vikings into bloody pulp!" Marrs remarks. "It's not just a Nintendo game."

Hampton agrees that their collaboration was smooth. "Lee had worked on the story off-and-on for about a year and sold it to [editor] Mike Gold. Originally, Charles Vess was going to do it, but when he couldn't, I got the job. I worked from her full script."

Interestingly, Hampton notes his art doesn't show much Kubert influence. "I wanted it to have a *lot*, but for some reason, it wouldn't come through," he says. "Kubert has never really been a big influence on me, but I've always loved his stuff. Whenever I've tried to make something look like Kubert, it always fails. Even though I didn't make a conscious effort, I was hoping some of it would show through. But there are only a couple of panels that show any influence at all, and that's when the Viking Prince is dressed in full regalia, with a cape and wings coming out of his cap. I wanted Kubert to show

(continued on page 66)

Wherever the Viking Prince goes, Hampton assures he won't be "striding through the Sahara."

So, Where's the Milk?

By
DARCY SULLIVAN

Reid Fleming, World's Toughest Milkman, is taking the slow route to the screen.

Stranded somewhere in "development," that Hollywood waiting room/morgue, is a very frustrated milkman, Reid Fleming. This ornery pug would love nothing better than to cruise Tinseltown in a battered milk truck, pounce on studio executives, treat them to a few knuckle sandwiches and shout, "Where the hell's my movie?"

Where indeed? Reid Fleming, billed as the "World's Toughest Milkman" in Canadian writer/artist Dave Boswell's comics, was optioned for a film almost 10 years ago. His circuitous journey to celluloid has involved two major studios, a few major comedians and two major cinematic dogs: *Strange Brew* and *Hot to Trot*, whose failures dragged *Reid Fleming* from the starting gate just as he seemed ready to go.

Now, Reid has everything a struggling comic-book character could want: Producers (Joseph Loeb III and Matthew Weisman of Empath Films), a solid script (by Boswell, his creator), a major studio (Warner Bros.), even a star interested in playing him (Jim Belushi). Everything but the spark that will make the project "hot."

"This is the nature of the motion picture business—it's down to waiting for a green light," says Loeb. Alluding to the success of John Hughes' *Home Alone*, he adds, "If Reid Fleming were a 10-year-old boy, we would be going right now."

"I don't pretend to understand the workings of the executive mentality," says Boswell. "Whether the film gets made or not is subject to the success of

The fate of Dave Boswell's *Reid Fleming* movie may depend on "what people had for breakfast."

Photo & All Reid Fleming Art: Courtesy David Boswell

Art Copyright 1989 David Boswell

Producers Joseph Loeb III and Matthew Weisman hope to prevent the *World's Toughest Milkman* movie from souring.

similar projects, to who's available, to who's enthusiastic...probably to what people had for breakfast one morning."

Unlike such books as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Reid Fleming*'s readers still don't number in the millions and couldn't by themselves skyrocket his film (tentatively budgeted around $10-12 million) to even cult success. So, what is Fleming's appeal to the film community? Just this: He's damn funny.

"In 1981, a clerk at Hi De Ho Comics in Santa Monica gave me a copy of *Reid Fleming, World's Toughest Milkman*, and it was quite simply the *funniest* thing I've ever read, period," recalls Loeb. "It just made me pee."

Loeb's reaction was appropriate. After all, the first time Fleming ever appeared, as a doodle in Dave Boswell's sketchbook circa 1977, he was saying, "78 cents or I piss on your flowers."

At the time, Boswell was living in Toronto and drawing the *Heart Break Comics* strip for a Canadian weekly, *The Georgia Straight*. "One day, I was seized by this force—this has never happened to me before or since—saying, 'Do a page with this character as quickly as you can. Don't be neat, don't think about it too much, just do it,' " he says. "I did it in 20 minutes."

That 1977 page showed Fleming—a balding, portly brute with a squared-off nose and hedgelike eyebrows—fighting, guzzling rye, insulting a female customer, poisoning her fish with milk and bellowing two of his abusive catch phrases, "Why don't you shut up!" and the one about the flowers.

Compared to the subtler, more densely drawn *Heart Break, Fleming* was a breeze. "To me, *Reid Fleming* seemed very obvious," Boswell says. "I thought that one page said all there was to say about the character."

Within a few months of his 1978 premiere in the Vancouver-based alternative paper, Reid had elbowed *Heart Break* aside. (Boswell later published a book of *Heart Break Comics*, now available from Eclipse.) Boswell left the paper a year later, and in 1980, he self-published *Reid Fleming, World's Toughest Milkman* in a printing of 10,000. The 32-page comic introduced non-Canadians to the misanthropic milkman, his wishy-washy boss Mr. O'Clock, his literally blockheaded supervisor Mr. Crabbe, his dozy colleague Lowell Cooper (a.k.a. Captain Coffee) and Lena, a sharp-tongued actress who makes Reid's butter run.

In a typical *Reid* "adventure," Mr. Crabbe urges Mr. O'Clock to fire Fleming for his latest misdeed, generally involving the destruction of at least one milk truck and an assault on a passel of customers. To avoid punishment, Reid must double-talk Mr. O'Clock, as a last resort extolling their companionship as bald men. (Nonetheless, Reid insists, "I'm not bald—I get my hair cut this way!") While enacting a complicated revenge on Mr. Crabbe, Reid woos Lena, taunts Lowell Cooper, aggravates a few more Milk, Inc. clients and commandeers a TV set to watch his favorite show, *Horrors of Ivan*, a TV series demonstrating the off-kilter humor Boswell marries to Reid's slapstick antics.

Once, it was a thrilling adventure serial called *Dangers of Ivan*, which had Reid hooked. When Ivan drove a car off a cliff and ended up in a coma, Reid stayed tuned for more exciting exploits. But Ivan stayed in a coma for six years. One day, Ivan does reawaken, only to fall out a hospital window and die. From then on, the show is called *Horrors of Ivan*, and features a suited skeleton wandering through lonely hallways and speaking in non-sequiturs.

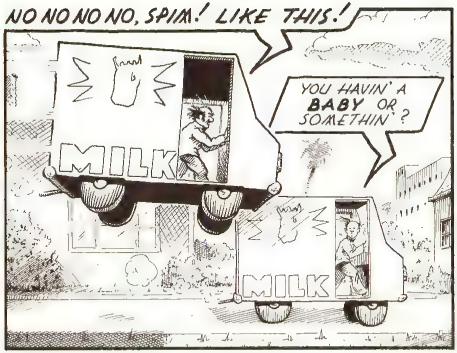
Boswell doesn't see this as so odd. "Reid likes someone who's dead," he says. "I and many other people are fans of the dead, be they writers, actors, composers, whatever. Most of my favorite people are dead."

In 1986, Eclipse picked up *Reid Fleming*, reissuing Boswell's original comic. Eclipse has since published Boswell's five-issue Reid Fleming saga, which ended in late 1990. "Rogue to Riches" details Reid's various misadventures, leading to his expulsion from Milk, Inc. and final rise to the company's throne.

Various aspects of the comic come from Boswell's own life. Reid Fleming was named for the bad boy in the writer/artist's kindergarten class and shares the sociopathic behavior of Darryl, a malcontent Boswell met while living in a downtown Toronto rooming house in 1976.

"Darryl loved to pull routines on people with a straight face, then go home, lie in bed and laugh about it," recalls Boswell. "Once, he told an old man who lived in the rooming house that the rust spots on his fridge were a form of 'fridge illness.' The man was pretty concerned, and Darryl said there

Photo Courtesy David Boswell



Art Copyright 1989 David Boswell All Rights Reserved. Art: David Boswell

Reid Fleming shows a co-worker how to really punch that cow truck.

was only one thing to do: Bury the thing. He then watched as the old man dug a huge hole and buried his perfectly good fridge.

"With Reid, as with Darryl, there's a surface violence, but the real motive is laughter. Reid is doing pretty awful things, but then he goes home and laughs about it."

For Joseph Loeb III, Reid's wildcat humor made him strangely admirable. "I think Reid is every man's hero," says the screenwriter/producer. "We all hate our jobs and our bosses, and would rather sweep women off their feet by being obnoxious boors. But Reid also has a boyish innocence—he never socks Mr. Crabbe; he finds *Leave It to Beaver*-type ways to do things. He's the W.C. Fields of the '90s."

Loeb and writing partner Matthew Weisman were so smitten with Reid that they tried to option the film rights back in 1982, after reading only the first issue. "Matthew saw it as a low-budget *Rocky Horror Picture Show*-type of thing," Loeb says. "I was 22, and the secretary for a TV producer. I called David, presented myself as a producer, and tried to buy the film rights to *Reid Fleming* with $500 of our own money."

In Hollywood, $500 is skim milk, even for an "underground" Canadian cartoonist. But Boswell would live to regret turning down Loeb and

Skim pickings for Reid Fleming: Dave Thomas (left) originally had the movie rights. Bob Hoskins and Jim Belushi are current casting possibilities.

Hoskins Press Photo Copyright 1989 MGM

Hoskins/Reid Heat Photo Copyright 1988 Touchstone Pictures & Amblin Entertainment

Belushi/Red Heat Photo Copyright 1988 Tri-Star Pictures, Inc.

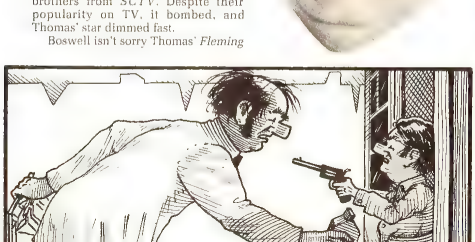
Weisman's offer. Casting about for a better deal, the creator came into contact with *SCTV* comedian and fellow Canadian Dave Thomas.

"I mailed a copy of *Reid Fleming* on a Friday. On Monday morning, Dave Thomas phoned up—the amazing thing in this case being the speed of the Canadian postal service," says Boswell. "He was very enthusiastic about doing this as his next movie." The actor/comedian was making the jump to films, and had a contract with MGM. According to Boswell, Thomas gave him a $5,000 option payment for the rights to *Reid Fleming*.

First, though, came *Strange Brew*, directed and written by Thomas and Rick Moranis; the duo also starred in the film, as the dimwitted McKenzie brothers from *SCTV*. Despite their popularity on TV, it bombed, and Thomas' star dimmed fast.

Boswell isn't sorry Thomas' *Fleming*

Boswell hopes to see Larry "Bud" Melman play Fleming's boss, Mr. O'Clock.



Art ©copyright 1986 David Boswell

"There's a surface violence," notes Boswell, "but the real motive is laughter."

never happened. "Many things were said that were not acted upon later," he says with characteristic diplomacy. "I was assured I would be a collaborator on the script, and I was surprised to later receive a script in the mail that Thomas had written. He said he banged it out in 10 days, but it looked more like 10 *minutes*. There wasn't a laugh in it."

Among the script's transgressions was its taming of Reid. "It made Reid into a pathetic character," the cartoonist laments. "He lost his job and became a self-pitying alcoholic so that there could be this uplifting ending."

While Thomas fumbled the ball, Loeb and Weisman co-wrote *Teen Wolf*, co-wrote and associate-produced *Commando*, and wrote and co-produced *Burglar*. The latter convinced Warner Bros. to give the partners another project. Loeb and Weisman suggested *Reid Fleming*; they would produce and guarantee the script, which Boswell would write.

When the producers showed the comic around Warner Bros., "We thought it was completely different from anything we had ever seen," says Bill Gerber, senior vice president in charge of production. "*Reid Fleming* is a very original comic-book hero."

And Warner Bros. had a very original guy in mind to play him. "At the time, the screen tests for *Burglar* were showing—believe it or not—that Bobcat Goldthwait was the funniest man in America," Loeb remembers. "Warner Bros. was going to make another film with him. We pitched Bob Goldthwait for *Reid Fleming*; he wanted to do it and Warner Bros. agreed. Then, they had to buy the rights from MGM; that was expensive."

Boswell was delighted that Loeb and Weisman were taking charge. He was also surprised that MGM owned the rights to his character.

"That's not what I was told by Mr. Thomas," he says cautiously. "In fact, I was told the rights had reverted to me." Boswell himself received nothing from Warner Bros. for the film rights to *Reid Fleming*, which Boswell says they now own "lock, stock and barrel."

With Reid seemingly back on track, Boswell hurried down to Hollywood circa 1987 to write the script—by *hand*. "He couldn't type," says Loeb. "But the script had beautiful calligraphy. It was like a piece of art. At times, he even drew on it."

In Boswell's script, which underwent two minor rewrites, Reid Fleming must fight to save Milk, Inc. and clear his name after a rival firm—assisted by square-noggined Mr. Crabbe—steals all Milk, Inc.'s cows and pins the rap on Reid. "It's like a modern-dress Western," he explains.

The film seemed imminent—until Bobcat Goldthwait tumbled off the "next-big-thing" roster. "He made a talking horse movie," says Loeb, alluding to Warner Bros.' *Hot to Trot*, which limped through theaters in 1988. "[Warners] wasn't interested in making *any* more movies with him."

Goldthwait's accidental exit from the project put *Reid Fleming* back in limbo. Loeb, Weisman, Boswell and Warner Bros. began tossing about other names to play Reid. "We've talked about John Candy, Danny DeVito, Bob Hoskins," says Loeb. "Dave has brought up Jack Nicholson several times."

In truth, Boswell would love to see Hoskins get the part. "To me, the important thing is his intensity and the way he conveys that through his eyes," Boswell says. "Just look at the last scene in *The Long Good Friday*. He's menacing, but he has a core of sympathy. To me, he's head and shoulders above any other choice, though in actuality, he's quite short."

Others who have expressed interest in playing Reid include Dana Carvey and Jon Lovitz from *Saturday Night Live*. Boswell says, agreeing that lanky, bushy-haired Carvey seems "a bit of a stretch. To me, there's a great difference between Bob Hoskins and Dana Carvey." Boswell still shudders when he recalls a studio meeting in which Jacko—the Australian muscleman best known for his Energizer ads and a short-lived TV series, *The Highwayman*— was suggested to play Reid.

Strangely enough, Boswell is more

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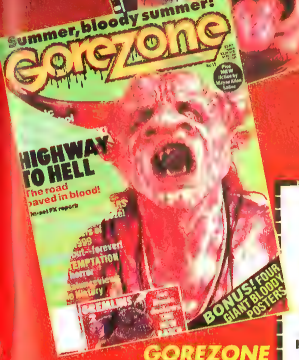

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LEADERS OF THE PACK

They've already put "Power Pack" on film, but getting it on the air won't be child's play.

By PETER BLOCH-HANSEN

Meet the Powers that be: Julie (Margo Finley, left), Alex (Nathaniel Moreau), Jack (Bradley Machry) and Katie (Jacelyn Holmes).

Producer Richard Borchiver says the Pack will need teamwork to escape and lay the evil to rest" in a haunted house.

"We wanted a new, fresh, clean show with no strings attached," says producer Richard Borchiver of Canada's Paragon Entertainment, who, together with New World Television, has finished a 30-minute pilot adapted from *Power Pack*, Marvel's recently cancelled superhero kids' comic. "It's an unusual formula and very risky for a Canadian company to put a pilot together without a buyer up front," he adds.

The show, like the comic, revolves around the Power family and in particular the four pre-teen children, Alex, Julie, Jack and Katie. But, like all TV adaptations, the series has given the material its own spin. The superpowers have changed "to make it work a little better, to separate the powers and make them more distinguishable," explains Borchiver. In the TV version, only Alex, the eldest, can fly. He has also replaced Jack as the one who levitates things. Katie, the youngest, is now the team's energy/matter converter and fireball hurler. Julie, who now has Katie's rainbow colors, has superhuman speed, but can't turn herself into a cloud. Jack can shrink.

Among other changes made in the transition from comics to television is that the kids *don't* wear costumes. "It'll be more the Clark Kent kind of thing," the producer comments. "Finally, on TV, the children's parents are aware of their super-powers. They advise as well as caution the children in using their powers wisely."

This is the most significant alteration of the formula, shifting the whole dynamic of the Power family. It was a carefully considered change, Borchiver discloses. "The problem with the original formulation is that it makes it very difficult to expand the show. If you have a series where you try and conceal something, then that becomes the thrust of each show. It's funny for a while and it's interesting, but it doesn't make for a show with longevity." This decision, of course, rules out the possibility that the parents could discover or be told the big secret at some point during the season, so that it would then become the impetus for a new development in the series.

Borchiver's intent is that except for their special abilities, the Powers are a regular, modern family in every respect, dealing with normal problems. "Our supervising creative executives from New World—Michael Levine and Jason Brett [who wrote the pilot]—are both young guys with families of their own," he explains. "They can relate to what kids go through, things like sibling rivalry, lost loves, Mom getting into a crisis, drugs. As the show evolves, there will be lots of villains and the kids will solve many problems. They'll solve problems at school using their powers. They'll have to deal with bullies and the kinds of things regular kids meet. The show that we're producing, if you pulled out the supernatural element, would have a script that could stand on its own.

"Except for the special FX around the kids, it's *The Wonder Years*," he adds. "It's not about teaching morals, but there are things to be said *beyond* the special FX. It's that kind of a show. This is not a premise pilot *per se*, but one thing that does come across is the message from the father to the children. He tells them that when you're

endowed with powers or a gift or some special quality that puts you in an advanced position with respect to other people and society, you ought to have a hell of a lot of respect for that quality. You must use it for very specific reasons in the interests of good instead of evil. That's the parameter of the series as it unfolds.

"Honesty and being honest with yourself is the thrust of the first show. It would be an enormous temptation for anybody who could fly, or anybody who's a genius or anybody who has fantastic athletic ability, to use it in a situation where they shouldn't. In the first show, one of the kids uses his powers to more or less show off to some of his friends. He gets [the Power children] into a dangerous situation, and they basically walk off with an item that isn't theirs. Even though the item is owned by a person who's sort of a frightening, ominous character, nevertheless, Jack has committed a wrong. He has used his powers to do that and he pays for it.

"In the pilot, the antagonist lives in a haunted house, with skeletons, rats and so on, but the interesting thing is that he wasn't really bothering anybody until somebody came in and started bothering him. So, I don't know if you would say that he's really a villain. He's certainly not the kind of guy you would want to meet in the middle of the night."

Art: Lane Bo-ogart/Ross Andru

The Pack's powers somewhat differ in the TV pilot "to make them more distinguishable," Borchiver explains.

Power Pack opens in deep space. While the credits roll, a voice-over explains the origins of the Power children's super-powers. Inspired by their innocence and honesty, a visiting alien passes his superhuman abilities on them in trust. The story itself opens with the Power family moving into and adjusting to a new neighborhood, a new school, new friends and so on. It soon takes on a supernatural atmosphere when Jack leads some of his newfound friends on a daredevil visit to the local "haunted house." He and his brother and sisters are soon in trouble with the house's deceased owner and must use their super-powers to survive. Ultimately, it's the teamwork among the children that enables them to escape and lay the evil to rest.

"The main kick in this for me," says Borchiver, "is creating something out of nothing, or from a very general idea and watching it develop into a series. It's when it clicks in and gets picked up, that's when the rush comes financially. My favorite thing in the pilot it-

Julie's (Finley) father told her to use her super-speed wisely, which in this case should include cleaning her room.

Power Pack Characters, Art: Inc. ™ & © 1984 Marvel Entertainment Group
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"Except for the special FX around the kids, [*Power Pack*] is *The Wonder Years*," says Borchiver.

The "main kick" Borchiver gets from *Power Pack* is watching "a very general idea develop into a series."

sell was the look on the kids' faces when they came into the mansion and saw the vehicle we had made for them to act in. We had created a haunted house, spider webs, rats on the floor, all out of a regular house. You walked into this place and it was terrifying."

Despite its comic book origins, the pilot's creators feel that *Power Pack* will have a wide audience appeal. "I've given up guessing in this business," the producer laughs. "I would love it to be in a prime-time network slot, possibly a first run syndication 7:00 7:30 slot, but my guess is that it's going to appeal more to the Saturday morning, under-18 group. Then, it'll pick up the parents in their early 30s watching with their kids. My kids, who are four and three, will miss things in the pilot that perhaps a 12-year-old will pick up on, but will get other things."

The years of progress in screen FX and video technology have eliminated many of the challenges of adapting a comic book for TV. "The show is grounded in reality," Borchiver asserts. "The chief challenge in using live-action to bring out what you want to accomplish is good writing and good actors. It doesn't matter what your show is; you can always clear up special FX. You get what you pay for. If you buy good special FX, you *get* good ones. If you buy cheap ones, you *get* cheap ones. The problem with adaptation is finding the actors who can bring out what you want. That's where we spent most of our time and energy. In fact, the show wasn't cast fully until the day before we started to shoot [during December 1990]. We chose all Canadian actors who are not known in the United States, first of all, because it's a Canadian content show, and we just wanted new faces."

Cast in the roles of Mr. and Mrs Power are Jonathan Whittaker and Cheryl Wilson. The children include Nathaniel Moreau (Alex), Bradley Machry (Jack), Margot Finley (Julie) and Jacelyn Holmes (Katie).

"When *Family Ties* was originally done," reflects Borchiver, "they thought the focus character would be Meredith Baxter Birney, and it turned out to be Michael J. Fox. *Power Pack*

(continued on page 66)

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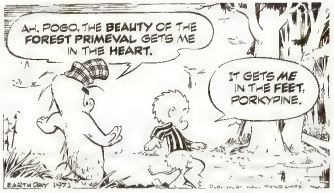

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Wonder

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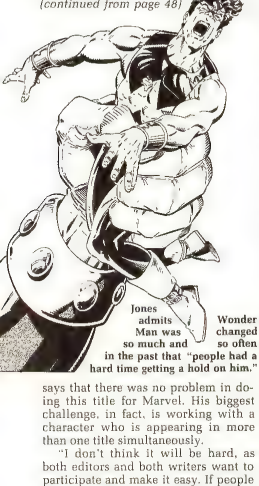

Jones admits Man was so much and so often in the past that "people had a hard time getting a hold on him."

Wonder changed

says that there was no problem in doing this title for Marvel. His biggest challenge, in fact, is working with a character who is appearing in more than one title simultaneously.

"I don't think it will be hard, as both editors and both writers want to participate and make it easy. If people want to get down to fighting over turf, it can be difficult. But if we all want to make it work, we can find ways around the challenges. I don't know what will happen if the West Coast Avengers have a 10-issue story set on Venus, but we'll deal with that as it comes."

But for now, one of the busiest writers in comics will be slowing down (according to his standards). Gerard Jones says *The Shadow Strikes!* will be winding down soon, leaving him with *Green Lantern, Wonder Man, Justice League Europe, The Trouble with Girls,* the *Girls* screenplay, a four-issue *Elongated Man* mini-series and an animation feature screenplay for Joel (*Die Hard*) Silver (tentatively titled *Arrow*). Like he says, his workload has slowed, but *not* stopped.

As for Jeff Johnson, he says even if *Wonder Man* doesn't take off the way he hopes it will, he has enjoyed it.

"It has been a blast. Gerry and I have a good relationship. Terry Austin, who's one of my biggest influences, is inking the book. And he is such a nice guy, and his stuff is so amazing! And he's inking *my* book! This is such a great medium. Hopefully, the fact that I'm having a great time on *Wonder Man* will show. This has got to be the greatest job in the whole world."

Viking

(continued from page 56)

through in the faces, but in a way, I'm glad it didn't, because Jon is a good bit younger than he was when Joe Kubert did him. In a few panels, you can see that Kubert scowl, looking down. But my noses aren't that long, and I don't keep the eyes that inset, so even if I tried my best, I *couldn't* make it look like Kubert's."

Before painting the book, Hampton says he did four-by-six thumbnail sketches for almost every page. "Most of the time, I would put that on a big projector and blow it up to 16-by-11 or whatever, and I would trace it off the opaque projector and work on it that way. Sometimes, I actually worked from photographs—the last third of my book, I really had fun using my immediate family members, and my wife and myself as the main characters!"

One of Hampton's longtime inspirations is the rotoscoping done by artists at the Disney Studios. "They used to take a photograph, but change it so much that you can defy somebody to identify it. Nobody I've shown this to can tell me which panels are photos and which ones aren't. I've drawn long enough that I can make it work this way.

"As far as technique," he explains, "I used regular watercolor and gouache, which is an opaque watercolor. Some of the backgrounds were actually done in oil paints, and I used oil pastels, too. It's pencil drawing underneath, for the most part, and there's an ink line sometimes, too, and it's all done on Strathmore smooth-plate illustration board."

Viking Glory is also a family project. "My sister Tracy is doing the lettering on it—she letters everything that my brother Scott and I do. It's our own little core of nepotism in the world!

"It took about two years to do this project. It would have taken a year-and-a-half, but we had a baby there toward the end. The original deadline for the artwork was last August, and I knew I couldn't make it when I found out that the baby was due August 11. I told Mike Gold that one of these deadlines had to give, and I knew which one it had to be!" he laughs. "So, I was able to take more time with this, and I'm glad. The last sequence, where he encounters the dragon, is some of my best artwork, because I had more time for those pages."

And so, with the help of Lee Marrs and Bo Hampton, Jon the Viking Prince has begun recapturing his *Viking Glory*—and slaying dragons—in the '90s.

Power

(continued from page 64)

isn't designed for that sort of thing. It's designed for the four children to each 'hold court' equally, but that's really beyond our control. You always hope your actors will break out. If one of the kids really starts to have wide audience appeal and becomes the reason that ratings achieve levels you might not have anticipated otherwise, then you promote that kid and make him or her the star. That's unavoidable."

Since it features four child actors, the show's format will present other problems if it becomes a series. By law, children are limited as to the number of hours they can work per day. Tutors and guardians must be provided, and there are always the problems of childhood illnesses and accidents, to say nothing of childish temperament. "It's the cost of doing business," Borchiver says. "It's a financial problem, not a creative one. I wouldn't do it if it wasn't going to work."

The producer estimates that the 30-minute show would cost about $500,000 (US) per episode, which is about typical for programs filmed in Canada. He also estimates that FX would account for $60–70,000 of that.

The pilot's FX, credited to Stargate Studios, were supervised in Toronto by Peter Mayboom, who was also responsible for FX in the recent *Twilight Zone* series. "Michael Levine didn't want to cliché the FX," comments Mayboom. "Take Julie's rainbow effect. He was adamant that it be *downplayed* rather than overplayed. It was the same with [Jack's] shrinking and growing. This is pretty unusual. Generally in FX, they want to blow your mind, but Levine took the attitude that less is more."

With a studio crew of four to five and a smaller post-production crew, the optical FX were achieved using Quantel digital image compositing equipment, similar to that used on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. The title sequence is reminiscent of *Next Generation*'s planet fly-by.

Currently, Borchiver is marketing the pilot to American networks for possible airing this fall and, alternately, looking for a syndication deal. "Generally, what happens during pilot season," he explains, "is that the networks look at stuff they've funded first, then they look at independent projects. We've had some interest, but no takers yet." While Paragon holds some of the rights involved, Richard Borchiver currently has no plans for tie-ins to other Marvel titles, but he's open to the idea. "That's really in Marvel's control, not ours. My thrust is getting a series on the air and keeping it there for five years!"

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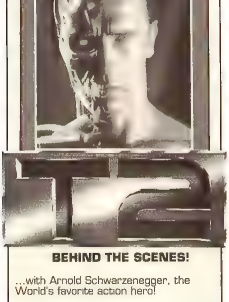

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Is Reid Fleming headed for Hollywood? Loeb thinks so. "He's the W.C. Fields of the '90s."

Milkman

(continued from page 60)

adamant about the casting of supporting roles. He sees Catherine O'Hara, the *SCTV* alumnus last seen in *Home Alone*, as the ideal Lena. "And for Mr. O'Clock, I would love to have Larry 'Bud' Melman from *Late Night With David Letterman*," he enthuses. "He can convey mental twilight without saying a word. Imagine Bob Hoskins and Larry 'Bud' Melman in a scene together—it would just be fabulous."

Melman may be a possibility, though Hoskins seems unlikely, Boswell says. Right now, Jim Belushi has the best shot (his son worships Reid, say Loeb and Boswell), and Warner Bros. should be closely watching the take on *Curly Sue*, an upcoming John Hughes movie starring Belushi.

For a director, Loeb, Weisman and Boswell pick Steve Johnson as their first choice. Johnson is known for his work on both the first season of *Pee Wee's Playhouse* and on several Peter Gabriel videos, including "Sledgehammer." No one has a lock on the job yet, however, and Boswell says he saw initial wish-lists of directors "that seemed to list *everybody*. One had Woody Allen's name on it—I mean, come on!"

Reid Fleming may or may not careen across the silver screen soon, but he enjoys continued success in his print run. "Sales are very good," says cat yronwode, Editor-in-Chief of Eclipse Comics. "They're not phenomenally high when an issue comes out, but *Reid Fleming* seems to be a perennial. We keep going back to press; some issues are on their third and fourth printings. Not too many comics keep on selling like that—Robert Crumb's do and *Love and Rockets*, but not many."

Eclipse will collect all five installments of "Rogue to Riches" this summer in *Fun With Reid Fleming*, a 176-page volume issued in softcover, hardcover and as a limited edition with an autographed tip-in color plate. This edition (limited to 300 or so) will sell for an estimated $75, a price Boswell laughingly calls "bloody awful."

While waiting for the *Reid Fleming* movie to fire up, Loeb and Weisman are working with Stan Brooks at Disney on a project called *Flynn*, based on the novels of Gregory McDonald (who also wrote the Fletch books) and starring Tom Selleck. Loeb has also written DC's current *Challengers of the Unknown* mini-series, as Jeph Loeb (see CS #18).

After some 14 years of penning *Reid Fleming*, Boswell has decided to give the roughhouse a rest and pursue other ideas. He's considering both a spoof of comics' opera adaptations ("They're a fundamentally ludicrous enterprise—you can't hear the music," he argues) or the exploits of Ray-Mond, a cretinous would-be superhero who has so far only appeared in a one-page strip for a Canadian Animation Society publication, in late 1985. Boswell admits he hasn't fleshed out Ray-Mond's scenario yet, but says, "I think he should live in a rooming house."

When Reid returns, readers may learn his "origin"—how he got hired by Milk, Inc.—or see him as a young boy. "One scene haunts me," Boswell says. "Reid is a nine-year-old boy, playing with a mirror in the backyard, bouncing the sunlight off an airliner." Boswell then does an engaging vocal impression of a plane crash.

His turns on the Hollywood merry-go-round don't seem to have soured the boyish cartoonist. He says he's content to live frugally in Vancouver with his wife, Kathi, and their four children, and he doesn't wait by the phone for Hollywood to call.

"I feel one day Matt and Jeph will phone up and say, 'Good news, we're gonna make a movie!' " Dave Boswell says. "And I feel this could be the year. But I never spend any time wishing or hoping or waiting. That's wasted time. If we make the film, great. If we don't, I don't want it to be a negative thing in my life."

Reid Fleming would never be so understanding. In fact, just in case the dangerous dairy-products deliverer does exist somewhere, the folks at Warner Bros. might want to start production, pronto. That is, if they value their flowers.

COMICS REPORTER

COMICS SCREEN

Darkwing Duck and Launchpad battle crime on ABC and in syndication.

All projects are live-action unless specified. Those marked by an asterisk (*) have changed status since last listing. **Not everything listed will ultimately be made.** Abbreviations: S=script; D=director; P=producer; AN=animated; LA=live-action; HB=Hanna-Barbera; WB=Warner Bros.; RB=Rankin-Bass; U=Universal. **Attn. all pros:** Info to be added to this list is cheerfully invited. Send to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Ave. South, 8th Flr., NY, NY 10016. (Info as of 4/26/91)

* **The Addams Family.** Film. Paramount. D: Barry Sonnenfeld. S: Caroline Thompson & Larry Wilson. Morticia: Anjelica Huston. Gomez: Raul Julia. Fester: Chris Lloyd. Due X-mas.

The Airtight Garage. AN. S: Randy Lofficier.

Alias. Film. U. S: David S. Goyer. P: P. Lenkov, S. Daniel.

* **Alley Oop.** Film. Columbia. Seeks writer.

The American. Film. P: Joel Silver. S: Mark Verheiden.

American Flagg! Film.

An American Tail: Fievel Goes West. Sequel. November release. TV series? HB.

Annie. Sequel. D: L. Gilbert.

Ant-Man. Film.

Archie. LA Film. S: Nora & Delia Ephron. D: Joel Schumacher. DIC.

Baby Huey. AN short. U.

* **Barbarella.** TV. LA. Nelvana.

* **Batman.** Sequel. S: Dan Waters. D: Tim Burton. Batman: Michael Keaton. Penguin: Danny DeVito. Catwoman: Annette Bening. AN series debuts '92 on FBC.

Beetle Bailey. Film.

Beetlejuice. AN series. ABC, video & FBC. Film.

Blackhawk. Film. Amblin. S: Dan Aykroyd.

Blackman. Film.

Blade. Film. S: Lee Goldberg & William Rabkin.

Blinky Bill. Australian AN film. P: Yoram Gross. '92.

Blondie. Film musical. Disney. S: Alfred Uhry. P: Francine LeFrak, Dean Young.

James Bond. AN series, *Adventures of James Bond Jr.* P: Murakami Wolf Swenson. Fall '91.

Betty Boop. Film. D: R. Fleischer.

Bonkers D. Bobcat. Syndicated AN series. Disney. Bows '92.

Brenda Starr. Film.

Bucky O'Hare. AN series (13 episodes). Syndicated. P: Sunbow, IDDH, Claster TV.

Bugs Bunny. *Tiny Toon Adventures* spinoffs: *Tazmania* & *Elmyra's Family.*

Bullwinkle. *Boris & Natasha.* Series on video.

Capitol Critters. AN series. Steven Bocho Prod. ABC.

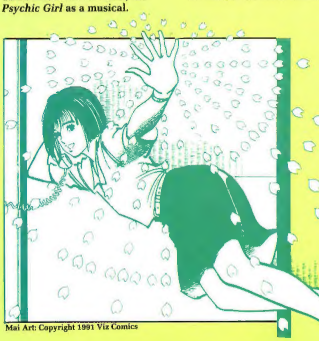
Captain America. Film.

Captain Planet. AN series. Live stage show planned.

Casper. Film.

Cats. AN. Amblin. '93.

Tim Burton will film *Mai, the Psychic Girl* as a musical.



Mai Art: Copyright 1991 Viz Comics

Cathy. AN TV. CBS.

Charlie Chan. Film. Chan: B.D. Wong. D: Fred Levinson. P: Gene Kirkwood, John Hyde.

Chicken Man. AN spoof series. Calico.

City of Darkness. Film. S: Patrick Cirillo & Joe Gayton. P: M. Douglas, R. Bieber. Col.

Conan. Film sequel. S: Charles Edward Pogue.

Danger Squad. Film. P/D: Leo Fong. W/D: P.R. Cable.

* **Darkwing Duck.** AN syndicated & ABC series. Disney. Bows fall.

Deathlok. Film.

Dinosaurs for Hire. Film. S: Richard Finney & James Bonny. Fox. FX: Henson C Shop.

DNAgents. Film. UA.

Dr. Strange. Film. Zoetrope. D: Alex Cox. P: F. Coppola.

* **Doug.** AN series. Nickelodeon. Bows August.

Dreamwalker. CBS TV film.

* **Dudley Do-Right.** Film.

* **Elfquest.** Film/TV. Abby Lou Prod, Freedom Distrib.

Evangeline. Film. Funnybook Films.

* **Family Dog.** AN series. CBS. P: S. Spielberg, Tim Burton, D. Klein. Premieres fall.

Fantastic Four. Film. Neue Constantin. P: Bernd Eichinger.

Far Side. AN TV.

Fearless Fosdick. LA & AN TV projects. Nelvana.

Felix the Cat. AN film.

Fish Police. AN series. HB. CBS. Pilot. S: Jeanne Romano. Six scripts ordered.

The Flash. TV. CBS. WB.

* **The Flintstones.** Film. Fred: John Goodman. U/Amblin. AN TV film. S: Jeanne Romano.

Fu Manchu. Film. *Secret of Fu Manchu:* David Carradine.

Garfield. Saturday a.m. series, *Garfield & Friends.*

Goofy. Syndicated AN series *Goof Troop.* Disney. Bows '93.

The Green Arrow. TV.

The Green Hornet. Film. S: D. Mancini. P: D. Kirschner. U.

Green Lantern. Film.

Grimjack. Film.

Gumby. Film.

Heroes for Hire. Film.

Honkytonk Sue. Film.

Hopalong Cassidy. Film. S: G. Popper, J. Rosenthal.

Darkwing Duck Art: Copyright 1991 The Walt Disney Company

Alligator Prods.

* **Human Target.** Pilot. ABC. W/ Rick Springfield, Clarence Clemons. P: Danny Bilson, Paul De Meo, Lawrence Lyttle. Possible fall series.

Inspector Gadget. LA TV series. DIC. Family Channel.

Iron Man. Film. D: Stuart Gordon. U.

The Jetsons. LA film. U.

Jo Jo. Film. P: Lee Caplin. S: Mike Chapman.

Jonny Quest. Film. U.

Judge Dredd. Film. S: H. Chaykin & J. Moore. P: C. Lippincott. 20th Fox.

Kaanga. Film. S: (D) Geoff Edwards, S. Bernard. P: L. Caplin, B. Edwards, T. Adams.

Li'l Abner. TV. P: Max & Micheline Keller.

Little Mermaid. AN prequel TV series. For '92. Disney.

Little Nemo. AN film. TMS Ent. Songs: Sherman Bros.

Lone Wolf & Cub. Film. D: John Bruno. P: Ed Pressman. S: Bill Wisher.

Lucky Luke. TV series. Terence Hill, star. Silvio Berlusconi Comm.

* **Mai the Psychic Girl.** Film. D: Tim Burton. S: Larry Wilson, Caroline Thompson. P: Burton, Wilson, Denise Di Novi, Walter Hill. Carolco.

Mandrake. Film.

The Mask. Film. New Line.

Mr. A. Video.

Mr. Magoo. Film. P: S. Tisch. AN/LA.

Mr. X. Film. P: Jim Cash & Jack Epps Jr.

* **Monster in my Pocket.** AN series or LA film. Pacific Rights Licensing.

* **Mother Goose & Grimm.** AN series. CBS. Film Roman, Lee Mendelson Prod. Fall '91.

* **My Secret Identity.** Sitcom. Cancellation likely.

Nancy. Film. P: P. Muller.

Negative Man. Bob Kane hero. LA series. Nelvana.

Neil the Horse. AN/LA.

Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD. Film. S: Greg Pruss.

Joe Palooka. Musical.

* **The Phantom.** Film. P: B. Sherlock, P. Sjoquist, J. Torv, R. Price. S: Ken Shadie. Creator Lee Falk, consultant. D: Simon Wincer.

Pico & Columbus. AN film. Bavaria Film.

* **Pirates of Dark Water.** AN series. ABC. HB.

* **Power Pack.** TV pilot. S: Jason Brett. New World & Paragon Ent. (see article)

Plastic Man. Film. WB/Amblin.

Prince Valiant. AN series. Family Channel.

The Prowler. Film. Funnybook Films.

The Punisher. Sequel?

Radio Boy. AN. RB.

* **Reid Fleming.** Film.

Barbarella Art: Boris Vallejo/Courtesy Paramount Pictures

Nelvana is developing a new live-action *Barbarella*.

The Simpsons. AN. FBC.

* **Speed Racer.** Film. S: Peter Lenkov. P: J. Silver. WB.

Spider-Man. TV pilot. New World. Stage musical. S & lyrics: B. Harman. Music: K. Herrmann. EXP: Stan Lee, D. J. Nash, J. Calamari.

* **Starwatcher.** F. Computer animation P: Alain Guiot/Videosystem. D: Moebius. S: Moebius & J. Fryzman.

Sub-Mariner. Film.

Superboy. Syndicated TV.

* **Superman.** *Superman: The New Movie.* S: Mark Jones & Cary Bates. To lense FL.

Super Mario Bros. LA film. S: Barry Morrow.

Swamp Thing. TV. USA.

Tales from the Crypt. HBO.

* **Tarzan.** LA series. Tarzan: Wolf Larson. Jane: Lydie Denier. Worldvision. 25 episodes. Debuts fall.

* **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.** AN series. CBS (18 new episodes) & syndication. Live show tours.

Terry & the Pirates. Film. S: J. Feiffer. P: G. Kirkwood, J. Hyde. EXP: S. Weston.

Thor. Film. Stonebridge.

Time Beavers. AN TV series. Kushner-Locke.

Tin-Tin. AN series. Nelvana. Ellipse. HBO fall '91.

Tom & Jerry. AN film due '92. P/D: Phil Roman. *AN Tom & Jerry Kids* airing.

Toxic Crusaders. AN series (13 episodes).

Trouble with Girls. Film. 20th Fox & Funnybook Films. S: Will Jacobs & Gerard Jones. P: M. Pepler, N. Tabachnick.

Valentina. 13-episode TV series. Dementra Hampton. Reteitalia.

Vampirella. Film. S/D: Jim Wynorski.

* **V for Vendetta.** Film. WB. S: Hilary Henkin.

WARP. Film. S/P: Mark Victor & Michael Grais.

Watchmen. Film. S: Sam Hamm. P: Joel Silver. D: Terry Gilliam.

We're Back. AN film. Amblin London/U. For '92.

Why I Hate Saturn. TV.

* **Wizard of Id.** Film. Cinergi.

Wolverine. Film.

Wonder Woman. TV series.

* **The X-Men.** Film. Carolco. P: Jim Cameron. AN five-episode mini-series. FBC. Marvel Prod.

Yogi Bear. *Yo! Yogi* AN TV series. Teen versions. HB. NBC.

Zen. Film. AN series.

* **Zorro.** Film. D: Steven Spielberg. Also TV series.

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S: creator David Boswell. P: M. Weisman, J. Loeb II. (see article)

* **Ren & Stimpy Show.** AN series. P/D: John Kricfalusi. Premieres August.

Richie Rich. Film. P: J. Silver, J. Davis.

RoboCop 3. S: Frank Miller & Fred Dekker (D). Robo: Robert Burke.

* **The Rocketeer.** Film. Disney. Rocketeer: Bill Campbell. (see article)

* **Roger Rabbit.** Prequel film. *Who Discovered Roger Rabbit.* D: Rob Minkoff. New short "Hare in My Soup."

* **Rogue Trooper.** Film.

* **Rover Dangerfield.** AN film. Summer release. WB.

* **Rugrats.** AN series. Premieres August. Nickelodeon. Klasky Group.

The Saint. Film. P: Robert Evans. Paramount.

Scooby Doo. Film. WB.

Secret Agent X-9. AN film.

Sgt. Preston. TV revival.

* **Sgt. Rock.** Film. P: Joel Silver, Bob Zemeckis. WB.

The Shadow. Film. S: David Koepp. P: Martin Bregman. U.

The She-Hulk. Film. S/D: Larry Cohen. W/B. Nielsen.

The Silver Surfer. Film.

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